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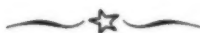
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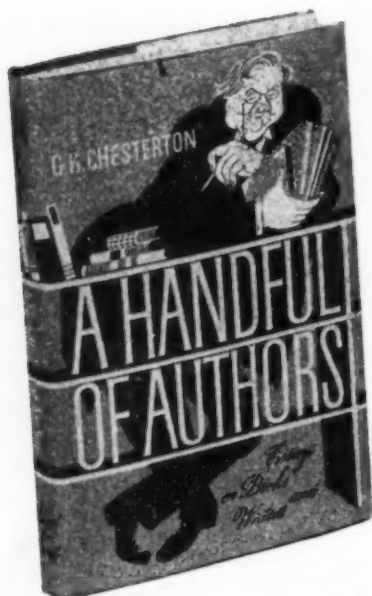
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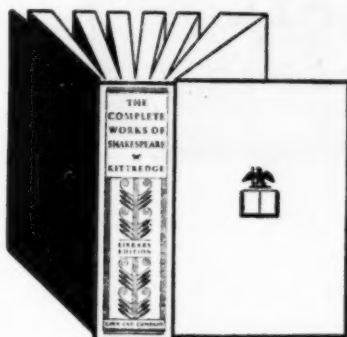


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# COLLEGE ENGLISH

Volume 15

NOVEMBER 1953

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## Kay Boyle

RICHARD C. CARPENTER<sup>1</sup>

IN HER autobiography, *The Passionate Years*, Caresse Crosby says of Kay Boyle: "Kay is built like a blade—to see her clearly you must look at her from one side and then from the other; both are exciting." This is an assessment which can be equally well applied to her writing, as can Mrs. Crosby's description: "neat as a needle . . . like a breeze or a bird's wing"—it is exciting, and it must be looked at from more than one angle to appreciate it thoroughly. After twenty-five years of writing short stories and novels, Miss Boyle manages to bring to her work the same vividness, the freshness of style, the subtle insights, and the craftsmanship that marked her first writing. Several of the tales in her most recent book, *The Smoking Mountain*, are as taut and clean as those which appeared in *First Lover and Other Stories* twenty years ago and as intense in their emotional currents as her first novel, *Plagued by the Nightingale*, which was published in 1931. The stories that appear from time to time in the *New Yorker* show no diminution of ability, and the chances are that reading one will bring an absorbing experience.

Yet Kay Boyle is singularly little

known; even college English professors are as a rule only vaguely aware of her existence and may recall with some difficulty having read a story in one of the several anthologies in which her tales have appeared. Her some dozen novels and over a hundred short stories, while frequently praised and often reprinted, have not given her a wide reputation. Few people have encountered such fascinating tales as *Monday Night* or *The Bridegroom's Body*, both of them eminently worth reading. However, the fact remains that Miss Boyle has done much excellent work and should be better known.

Encouraged by her mother, she started to write early and had by the age of seventeen written "hundreds of poems, short stories, and a novel." Married at eighteen and settled abroad, presumably for a visit, but actually as a permanent expatriate as it turned out, she wrote stories throughout the twenties and had her first collection published at the Black Sun Press in Paris by Caresse and Harry Crosby in 1929. This was republished in the United States as *Wedding Day and Other Stories*. In 1931 she started a full-fledged career of writing and, following her first novel, *Plagued by the Nightingale*, brought out four novels and two

<sup>1</sup> Bowling Green State University.



collections of short stories in the next five years. *Year before Last*, *Gentlemen, I Address You Privately*, and *My Next Bride*, all of them concerned with the pathos of love lost through weakness or circumstance, proved that she was a very subtle analyst of personality and established (together with *First Lover and Other Stories* and *The White Horse of Vienna*) her reputation as a stylist—an exquisite manipulator of the nuances of phrase and a craftsman with image and metaphor. By 1938 it appeared that she had laid claim to this title, for the blurbs on her books announced it, and the critics in general followed suit. While they praised her stylistic ability, they did, however, regret that her situations were not more realistic and that her people lived too much in the pale light of another world. At the same time they noted her uncanny immediacy and impact, for these tales are without doubt weirdly fascinating.

That she was an expatriate, using European backgrounds and characters largely, and that she soon came to be engrossed with political and social themes also were noticed—to her irritation, for she feels that she is writing about people, not places or politics. Still, such novels as *Death of a Man*, with its sympathetic analysis of the ideas and feelings of an Austrian Nazi; *Avalanche* and *A Frenchman Must Die*, “elegant pot-boilers”; and the short stories of this period show a preoccupation with the effect of political turmoil and war on quite ordinary people. Probably her weakest book, *His Human Majesty* (1949), is the result of her attempt to write on such a problem, the lives and loves of ski-troops, a task eminently unsuited to her kind of fiction.

A selection from her stories of the last twenty years or so, *Thirty Stories* (1946)

affords ample evidence, nevertheless, that she is more than either a stylist or a writer mesmerized by the confusions and alarms of our weary world. It becomes clear, on reading through these stories, that her twice winning the O. Henry Memorial Prize for the best short story of the year, her constant appearance in such magazines as the *New Yorker* and *Harper's Bazaar*, and the recent inclusion of her novella *The Crazy Hunter* in Ludwig and Perry's *Nine Short Novels* (in the company of James, Kafka, and Mann) have been no mere flukes and are due to more solid virtues than are comprised in style or political consciousness, good though those may be.

Of course, it is undeniable that she is an able manipulator of language. She enjoys the play of words; she has a keen eye for the striking image; and she can fascinate with the bold trenchancy of her metaphors: “Here then was April holding them up, stabbing their hearts with hawthorn, scalping them with a flexible blade of wind,” or “The waves came in and out there, as indolent as ladies, gathered up their skirts in their hands, and with a murmur, came tiptoeing in across the velvet sand.” Especially is it true that she can create amazingly sharp, vivid pictures: “Prince and Star were black as seals and here they stood in the white unmelting world, the two black horses steaming against the hard, bright, crust-ed snow. The white boughs of the trees were forked full in the woods around, and the twigs of the underbrush were tubed in glass the length of the frozen falls.”

Still, this mastery of style accounts for only one side of the blade that is Kay Boyle—the side that glitters and dazzles and, perhaps, blinds some readers to the more significant things she has to offer. Style is obviously integral to her work and makes it peculiarly her own; it un-



doubtedly helps heighten the intensity and immediacy which most readers recognize as the hallmark of Miss Boyle's writing. Dagger-sharp images and crackling metaphors do assist in raising the temperature of a story. Other qualities, however, seem to me to be more basic. First of all, a thorough acquaintance with the bulk of her work leads to an increasing appreciation of her mastery of her own kind of fictional technique. She has a most delicate touch in unfolding the lives of her characters, an exquisite sense of reticence and balance, all the while that the tale is trembling on the edge of pathos or sentimentality. Much of this effect she manages by carefully limiting the area of perception (something she may have learned from Chekhov or perhaps from Faulkner, whom she admires most highly), so that the reader becomes *aware* in the form of a gradual revelation, as do the principal characters. This contributes greatly to developing the "specification of reality," the sense of immediacy which James desired of fiction. When used, as Miss Boyle frequently does use it, with judicious foreshadowing, it creates a considerable current of tension without having much "happen" in the sense of the usual well-plotted story. We do not leisurely savor her stories but breathlessly turn pages, sure that these apparently innocuous events are somehow tremendously vital.

Beyond technique, Miss Boyle's basic themes are also productive of suspense and intensity. Her fiction world is not a happy one: she deals with disease, war, perversion, cowardice, frustration. Her people are complex souls undergoing a variety of torments, prevented either by their own weaknesses or by the devils of circumstance from living the rich and full lives which should be theirs. To make things worse, her people are not degraded

but *potentially* fine and *potentially* happy. They are sensitive, courageous, artistic, profoundly emotional. We like them, usually, and would like to see them happy, but they are the beautiful and the damned. Miss Boyle achieves her characteristic force by showing us a vision of humanity in need of pity and understanding, a central idea that does not make for light reading but one which accounts for the realism and effectiveness we inescapably feel as we read through her work. While probably not the end result of a reasoned philosophy, it is a telling and significant attitude toward life that makes of her writing much more than a pretty toy or a tract. Miss Boyle is not simply *interested* in people; she is vitally *concerned* with people and profoundly moved to write about their struggles with themselves and with their dreams. She does not write just to tell a tale, to make money, to create a thing of beauty, even though these may sometimes be her motives; but, as she has said, she also writes "out of anger, out of compassion and grief . . . out of despair." This is truly the other side of the blade.

From her earliest work we can see Miss Boyle working out this idea. *Plagued by the Nightingale* and *Year before Last* explore the relations between people whose happiness is shadowed by disease; *Gentlemen, I Address You Privately* is an analysis of perverted love. *Plagued by the Nightingale* is the story of an American girl who has married into a French family cursed with a hereditary disease which cripples the legs of the men. The conflict grows out of the insistence of the family, particularly Papa, that the young couple have a child, even though everyone knows the risk. A silent but bitter struggle, beneath the surface of an idyllic family life, is waged, with the family us-

ing the lever of promised money to weaken the son's resistance. The family loses, eventually, but the girl loses as well, for she leaves her husband, and her love, at the end. The novel is almost a parable, with Bridget and Nicholas—youth, beauty, and love—defeated by age and corruption, symbolized by the nature of the disease, a “rotting of the bone” as it is called. The corruption comes closer to home in her second novel, *Year before Last*, since Martin, the hero, is handsome, brave, sensitive, deeply in love, as well as tuberculous. He is, perhaps, a bit too much of these things and a trifle impossible, but he and his innamorata, Hannah, reiterate for us that the beautiful *are* often the damned. As we watch them flee across the south of France, with the hemorrhages becoming more frequent and deadly, we find our feeling of pity and our sense of irony steadily increasing until the inevitable death at the conclusion.

An interesting aspect of these novels is that they ought to be merely depressing instead of enthralling. However, through the poetic use of language and the method of implication and reticence, Miss Boyle lifts the story. Besides, because the reader creates the emotional tone for himself, as he gradually becomes aware of the situation, the essential tragedy is not sharply emphasized. The tale unfolds slowly, flower-like, so that we are almost able—almost, but not quite, like the characters themselves—to close our eyes on the worm i' the bud. The enervation of some of her later work is undoubtedly due to a partial abandonment of this method of implication for that of stream of consciousness and interior monologue where we are brought directly and explicitly into contact with the people's thoughts and emotions, usually in italics. In her weaker writing Miss Boyle tells us

too much; in her better we float on a placid, shimmering current, all the time aware of the cold, black, rushing depths beneath.

Naturally, this method can be overdone, as it is in her third novel, *Gentlemen, I Address You Privately*, where we see everything through a glass most darkly, so much so that it is difficult to realize what the theme is. An analysis of the chiaroscuro, however, shows that all the characters are twisted in some way: the cast is composed of two homosexuals, two Lesbians, a prostitute, a fanatic, a sadist, and one fine woman starved for love. In general, love is perverted in this novel; the characters are lost souls, whirled through the darkness of their desires.

The tale comes to a flat and tasteless end, despite some tension in the last chapters, and its people are too much for us to swallow—possible perhaps, but hardly probable. Still, with all its frigidity and confusion, it somehow sticks in the mind, like a reflection in a distorting mirror, concentrating for us the pathos and irony of Miss Boyle's theme. It is, as well, the furthest advance she has made in the use of implication and memorable for that reason.

Throughout Miss Boyle's writings prior to the war we can see the same techniques, the same quivering emotion held in tight leash, the concern with the interrelations of personality, the same bitter brew. Though the short stories naturally play many variations, they show the same fundamental theme, not difficult to recognize once it has been analyzed.

In some stories the problem is pride, as in “Keep Your Pity,” where the Wycherlys, impoverished Englishmen in the south of France, preserve appearances even beyond death. In others, such as “The White Horses of Vienna,” it is the

pathos of prejudice and misunderstanding. The young Jewish student-doctor, who has been called in to assist the injured Austrian Nazi, ought to be able to be a friend—he and the Austrian are really much alike, the Austrian with his worship of power and the Jew with his nostalgic idealism, his memory of the royal white horses of Vienna, “the relics of pride, the still unbroken vestiges of beauty bending their knees to the empty loge of royalty where there was no royalty any more.” But of course they cannot be friends.

Other stories are tales of initiation, in which an innocent or unknowing character learns evil—as in “Black Boy,” where a young white girl learns that she cannot have an innocent friendship with a black boy, at least not as far as her grandfather is concerned; or in *The Bridegroom's Body* (a novella), where Lady Glourie realizes that the young nurse who has come from the city has not been, as Lady Glourie suspected, in love with Lord Glourie or the farmer Panrandel but really with Lady Glourie herself. In “Natives Don't Cry” we see the beautifully low-keyed treatment of the real pathos in the old maid's life as the governess tries to pretend she is getting letters from her young man, when the mail was not delivered that day.

“Wedding Day,” one of Miss Boyle's best, a light and delicate study of personal relations between brother and sister on her wedding day, does not force theme on our attention, but there is still the sense of loss, of youth left somewhere behind, forever. “Count Lothar's Heart” concerns itself with what has happened to a young man who has had a homosexual experience during the war and cannot get it out of his mind, his perversion symbolized by the swans of the Traunsee, emblems of passion. “One of Ours”

studies through image and symbol the hidden feelings of a most proper Englishwoman who thinks a savage at an exposition is lusting after her—a projection of her desires, for he is really interested in the doll she is holding. The theme of distortion is carried out by her fascination with the savage's maleness as well as her fear of him.

It might be wondered whether or not Miss Boyle offers anything but utter blank and bitter pessimism with this constant iteration of the theme of a world out of joint. Indeed, it could be maintained that there is nothing else. A novel like *My Next Bride* (1934) leaves about as bad a taste in our mouths as anything we could find, with an American girl who deserves no evil falling into utter degradation through her love for another woman's husband. Perversely she becomes promiscuous rather than having her affair with Antony, making her pregnancy by some unknown especially fruitless. Probably the most unpleasant sequences Kay Boyle has ever written are to be found in the account of Victoria's attempts at abortion.

Yet the novel, *Monday Night* (1936), which has a protagonist who is repulsively dirty and possesses a nauseatingly mutilated ear, manages to distil something more positive from the flowers of evil. The contrast between the clean and the filthy, the innocent and the obscene, is implicit perhaps, but it is still there to provide a kind of counterpoint to the basic theme. In fact, this counterpoint may be seen running through many of her writings, indicating a corollary to the pessimism. A passage in “Count Lothar's Heart” symbolizes what this may be; speaking of the swans, she writes:

Some of them had thrust the long stalks of their throats down into the deeper places before the falls and were seeking for refuse along the

bottom. Nothing remained but the soft, flickering short peaks of their clean rumps and their leathery black elbows with the down blowing soft at the ebony bone. In such ecstasies of beauty were they seeking in the filth of lemon rinds and shells and garbage that had drifted down from the town, prodding the leaves and branches apart with their dark, lustful mouths.

Miss Boyle seems to be saying that the polarity between the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, is central in our lives. Wilt, in *Monday Night*, disreputable and dirty, is yet a dreamer of beautiful dreams which he conveys to us in long monologues written in an incantatory style strongly reminiscent of Faulkner, who, Miss Boyle says, strongly influenced the book. Wilt ought to be a great writer, yet he is a seedy drunk. Miss Boyle is not telling us that he is going to triumph over himself; rather she is showing us that he cannot possibly do so: the fact that he and his friend never reach the goal they seek is the only logic that the underlying theme will permit the plot. Yet Wilt is somehow noble. He is giving himself to an ideal; the tale is almost an allegory, a *Pilgrim's Progress* of this modern world, where modern man fails of heaven as a goal but finds his soul in the quest itself. Here, as in other places, we can see Miss Boyle implying that devotion, integrity, and courage are the means by which we transcend our fate.

This implication is particularly evident in the tales since the war; dealing with social and political themes, they throw the contrast between what is and what ought to be into clearer light. In the backwash of a war-world, the need for undramatic devotion and integrity is particularly great. A number of tales since 1938 benefit from this larger context. There is less tendency toward attenuating the situation; the characters

are often more believable, their suffering justified, their bravery less self-conscious, their defeat more real. It must be admitted that they transcend their fate but seldom. Many tales are vitiated by Miss Boyle's indiscriminate tenderness toward those who are the victims of war. Her best work in this type of writing is rather that which grows out of indignation, the failure of devotion and integrity. "Defeat," which won the O. Henry Memorial Prize in 1941, shows this indignation combined effectively with tenderness, the indignation coming from the failure of the French girls to resist the German blandishments of food and dance music, the tenderness for the men who realize their country is defeated only when its women are defeated.

Her most recent book, *The Smoking Mountain*, rings the changes on Miss Boyle's preoccupation with the war: there are some good stories in it and some that strain after sentiment. She is trying to show us the atmosphere of an occupied land in which all the old hatreds still smolder under the ashes of defeat. Probably the most interesting part of the book is the long, nonfiction Introduction, the account of Germans against German in the trial of a former Gestapo brute, a new kind of venture for her and one that may lead to more significant writing. A new venture is needed; to this reader it does not seem that Miss Boyle has lost any of her ability to perceive and convey human feelings and relations, there is no slackening of her mastery of prose style, and she has certainly not turned into a shallow optimist. Yet it would be a pleasant change to see a tale not tied to particular "conditions and conflicts," as she calls them, as universal as, let us say, the novelle *The Crazy Hunter* and *The Bridegroom's Body*, tales rich in background and symbol, powerfully motivated from



within the characters themselves, subtly reproducing the conflicts of personality. To my mind, these two short novels are the cream of her writing, together with such stories as "The White Horses of Vienna," "Wedding Day," and "Natives Don't Cry." It is fortunate that Professors Ludwig and Perry have reprinted *The Crazy Hunter*, and it would be well if someone would do the same for *The*

*Bridegroom's Body*, that eerie yet unforgettable re-creation of the swannery on the rain-drenched coast of England, with the magnificently vital yet tragically lonely Lady Glourie and the bitter irony of Miss Cafferty's love for her. Then more readers might be able to see that Miss Boyle not only can dazzle us with style but also can move us to a deeper understanding.

## *The Ordeal of Richard Wright*

NICK AARON FORD<sup>1</sup>

IN THEIR book *The Theory of Literature*, Wellek and Warren say that a work of art may embody the *dream* of an author rather than his actual life, or it may be the mask, the antiself, behind which his real self is hiding, or it may be a picture of the life from which the author wants to escape. In the writings of Richard Wright there are glimpses at different times of all three of these purposes. But his dreams are often nightmares, and his masks are designed to reveal more than they hide. Perhaps to a greater extent than any other contemporary American novelist, Wright's authorship is a creature of environment and tortured memories.

Born on a plantation near Natchez, Mississippi, his early life consisted of a series of moves from one unsatisfactory place to another, of gnawing hunger, of parental neglect and misunderstanding, and of incredible humiliation inflicted by white employers. The earliest experience he remembers is one of horror and fear. At the age of four he set fire to his parents' home and barely escaped being burned to death under it. For that act,

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despite his tender years, his mother beat him into unconsciousness. The effect is summarized in *Black Boy*, his autobiography, in the following manner: "I was beaten out of my senses and later I found myself in bed screaming, determined to run away, tussling with my mother and father who were trying to keep me still. . . . But for a long time I was chastened whenever I remembered that my mother had come close to killing me."

At six he was a drunkard, spending his waking hours begging drinks from patrons of a near-by tavern, while his mother worked in domestic service to support him and his younger brother. At twelve he fought bitterly with his aunt, threatening to cut her throat with a butcher knife which he angrily clutched in his fist. At sixteen he burglarized a neighbor's house and a college storeroom and sold the stolen goods.

Then came the turning point. He stumbled upon *A Book of Prefaces* by H. L. Mencken. Of this experience he says:

That night in my rented room, while letting the hot water run over my can of pork and beans in the sink, I opened *A Book of Prefaces*

and began to read. I was jarred and shocked by the style, the clear, clean, sweeping sentences. . . . This man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for there they were. Then, maybe, perhaps, I could use them as weapons?

The next year Richard left the South for Chicago and a new life. The past was dead; only its roots would persist as a memory of the days that had gone. But the memory was bitter. And out of it has flowed the bitter experiences of *Uncle Tom's Children*, of *Native Son*, of *Black Boy*, and of *The Outsider*.

Wright first gained national attention in 1938, when he won the \$500 prize, awarded by *Story Magazine*, for his book of short stories entitled *Uncle Tom's Children*. The following year Edward O'Brien, the distinguished anthologist, selected Wright's "Bright and Morning Star" as one of the two best short stories published in 1939 and one of the fifty best stories published in America since 1915.

Although our chief concern is with his novels, *Native Son* (1940) and *The Outsider* (1953), a bare statement of the plots of his prize-winning stories will assist in creating additional background for a better understanding of the major works.

Each of the four stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* portrays the Negro in violent revolt against some phase of his environment. In "Big Boy Leaves Home" the revolt against white suppression and brutality ends in the murder of a white man by two Negro boys, whose companion had been killed without provocation by the white man. In "Down by the Riverside" a long-suffering Negro revolts against conditions that deny his wife an equal chance at medical care and hospitalization; he is lynched after killing a

white man who symbolizes that repression. In "Long Black Song" the Negro husband revolts against the idea of a white man's using his wife for sexual purposes and returning the next morning to collect money for a phonograph which he had persuaded the victim to accept. The husband slays the seducer and waits with loaded gun for the lynching mob he knows will come. In "Fire and Cloud" the revolt is against crooked white politicians who try to frighten Negroes into political inactivity by mob violence against their leaders. In these stories Wright is perfecting a technique which reaches its fullest development in *Native Son*.

The main character in *Native Son* is Bigger Thomas, a twenty-year-old Chicago Negro who accidentally kills his wealthy employer's daughter. After he discovers the victim's death, fear drives him to burn her body in the furnace and later kill his frightened Negro girl friend who he thinks might, under police torture, betray his secret.

The murder of the white girl is purely accidental, accomplished by the pressure of a pillow over her mouth to keep her from telling her blind mother that he, the cnauffeur, had brought her upstairs in his arms when he discovered she was too intoxicated to walk up under her own power. Although Bigger felt responsible for returning his employer's daughter safely to her room, he was afraid his employers might dismiss him if they should know that he, a Negro, had found it necessary to fulfil this responsibility by carrying the incapacitated girl in his arms.

One of the ironic facts of the story is that although the murder was an accident, it need not have been. For Bigger hated all white folks. He hated them enough to murder without provocation. He felt that he had been cheated out of



everything good in life that he had wanted and that white people—all white people—were responsible for his unhappy predicament.

The action of the story is sensational, containing such a ghastly spectacle as the furnace scene, in which Bigger, who has thrust the dead girl's body into the red-hot furnace feet-foremost, discovers that the dangling head cannot be forced in. He takes the long, razor-sharp knife from his pocket and attempts to cut off the head, but the bones are too hard for his small instrument. Then he glances around the room until he sees a hatchet, which he uses to finish the job.

In one of the most pathetic scenes imaginable, the fleeing murderer, completely crazed by the fear of being captured, takes up a brick and beats out the brains of his innocent, trusting sleeping girl friend who has obediently agreed to stay with him until the end.

But the power of this book does not reside in the action or in the portrayal of character. It resides rather in the ethical and sociological implications of the action. The truth of this observation was recently impressed upon me when I saw the motion-picture version of the story, adapted for the screen by Wright himself and produced in Argentina. Without the doctrinal overtones of the novel, it turns out to be just another murder mystery of the kind that bombards the air waves every night from seven to eleven.

Wright's major purpose in this novel was to show that social and economic barriers against race lead to grave injustices toward racial minorities and that those injustices so distort character and personality growth that criminal monstrosities, such as Bigger, are produced. Wright attempted to support his theory by means of testimony presented in the murder trial of Bigger, which comprises

approximately one-third of the novel. It is revealed that Mr. Dalton, father of the girl that Bigger killed, has donated large sums of money to Negro charity and that he owns the South Side Real Estate Company in Chicago from which Bigger's family rents the one-room, rat-infested apartment in which the mother, daughter, and two sons live. When the defense attorney asks Mr. Dalton why he does not charge Negro tenants less rent for such uninhabitable accommodations, the philanthropist replies that it would be unethical to undersell his competitors. When he is asked why rent for Negroes is higher than that for whites, he replies that a housing shortage exists in the Negro community. Although he admits that he owns houses in other sections of the city where no shortage exists, he says he will not rent them to Negroes because he thinks Negroes are happier living together in one section. He further admits that, of all the Negroes his philanthropy has helped to educate, he has never employed one in the operation of his vast business enterprises.

The attorney for the defense, therefore, charged Mr. Dalton with the murder of his own daughter, for it was he who helped to prepare the soil in which a Bigger Thomas could grow. It was he who closed his eyes to the deeper longings of Negroes for justice and equality, attempting to salve his conscience by giving huge sums to racial charities. It was he who had shielded his daughter from all Negro contact, thus leaving her at the crucial moment incapable of wisely dealing with a rebel such as Bigger. If he had provided clean and decent apartments for Negroes as he had for whites; if he had established playgrounds for Negro children as he had for whites; if he had used his influence to open employment opportunities equally to Negroes and whites, a monster like

Bigger might not have arisen to take his daughter's life.

It is plain to see that, in so far as this doctrine is philosophy at all, it is a philosophy of social and environmental responsibility. Bigger became what he was, not because he was free to choose his course of action, but because circumstances over which he had no control had driven him to his doom. This is the philosophy of Karl Marx, of whom Wright at that time was a devoted disciple.

According to his own admission in *The God That Failed*, Wright was a member of the American Communist party from 1934 to 1944. When he wrote *Native Son* he believed that there was "no agency in the world so capable of making men feel the earth and the people on it as the Communist Party."

It is always hazardous to attempt to guess at the motivation for human action. One cannot know with certainty why Wright became a willing dupe for the Communists. His minority status and long history of unemployment, segregation, and physical deprivations undoubtedly contributed to his decision. But, above all, Wright believed then, as now, that the greatest tragedy of mankind lies in the inability of the individual to find satisfactory fellowship in the group. This theme is apparent in *Native Son*, takes on added significance in *Black Boy*, and becomes the underlying assumption of *The Outsider*. It is a theme, however, which Wright was not the first to discover or explore. Hawthorne was gravely concerned with it more than a century ago, and in our own day James Joyce and Thomas Wolfe gave it life. Joyce epitomized it in *Ulysses* when he presented the perplexities and sorrows of Dedalus in search of his father (the symbol of a kindred spirit rather than a blood relationship). Wolfe made it the burden

of all his books. In *Of Time and the River* he exclaimed: "We are so lost, so naked and so lonely in America . . . for America has a thousand lights and weathers and we walk the streets, we walk the streets forever, we walk the streets of life alone."

But Hawthorne and Joyce and Wolfe were not Negroes. They knew that this eternal loneliness of the individual is universal, not racial. They knew it could not be remedied by political party or social organization. But perhaps Wright thought the identification of the comrade with the Communist cell, which recognizes no racial distinctions, could be the solution to the problem. Ten years were required to convince him that he was mistaken. And the mental agony which accompanied his awakening was almost unbearable.

Thirteen years after *Native Son*, Wright's second novel, *The Outsider*, was issued by his original publishers. It is more violent than *Native Son*, but it is also more imaginative, more challenging, and more philosophical. Cross Damon, the protagonist, kills four men and drives the woman he loves to commit suicide. But Cross is not motivated by physical fear as was Bigger. He is caught in the cross-currents of an ideological warfare going on within himself. Except in the first case, he commits his murders to avenge an injured sense of justice, which, he believes, except for his intervention, would continue unchecked and unpunished.

In this novel Wright repudiates with vehemence many of the ideological and philosophical tenets he had espoused in *Native Son*. No longer does he believe that environment and the social milieu create the man. To him now, man is the product of his own free choice, and his destiny cannot be charged to any force or forces outside himself. He illustrates

this theory by permitting Cross to become suddenly freed of all previous commitments which may have been entered into by some type of compulsion or by pure chance. He accomplishes this by allowing his hero to emerge from a subway wreck incognito. The newspapers announce that Cross Damon is dead, his body so mutilated in the wreck that it could be identified only by the coat he had been wearing. Cross accepts his freedom and makes plans to leave Chicago for New York and a new life.

From the moment Cross decides to accept the news of his "death" as a reality, he begins deliberately to choose every act which he performs thereafter. His first significant act is the murder of a friend who recognizes him in Chicago. There is no outside compulsion that drives him to this murder. It is purely an act of freedom, performed in the interest of continued freedom. The other three murders are also the result of passionless deliberation, an exercise of the godlike freedom to which man is continually aspiring.

In 1946 Wright moved to Paris, where he has been living with his family ever since. Among his new-found friends is Jean-Paul Sartre, chief promulgator of the philosophy of existentialism. A warm friendship has developed between the two men, and it appears that Wright has been converted to his friend's philosophy. The American admits that he has found it urgently necessary "to search for a new attitude to replace the set of Marxist assumptions which had in the past more or less guided the direction of my writings." Although he asserts that "*The Outsider* is the first literary effort of mine projected out of a heart preoccupied with no ideological burden save that of rendering an account of reality as it strikes my sensibilities and imagination," the critical reader cannot escape the conclusion

that this book is not only strongly anti-Communist but also markedly existentialist.

Let us examine the first charge. In *Native Son* Jan and Mac, the Communist leaders, were presented as unselfish men who were willing to sacrifice themselves to the cause of racial justice and equality at a time when racial tolerance was much more unpopular than it is today. But in this book he has presented Blount, Hilton, and Blimen as jealous, hypocritical, perverted, unscrupulous, power-crazed puppets dancing to the satanic music of an all-consuming party. He describes the party leaders as follows:

Their Aims? Direct and naked power! They know as few others that there is no valid, functioning religion to take the place of the values and creeds of yesterday; and they know that political power, if it is to perform in the minds and emotions of men the role that the idea of God once performed, must be total and absolute.

... They will commit any crime, but never in passion. ... And whatever natural terrors of life there are in the hearts of man, whatever stupid prejudices they harbor in their damp souls, they know how to rouse and sustain those terrors and prejudices and mobilize them for *their* ends.

But in his relentless delineation of the brutality, stupidity, and revolting inhumanity of Communist methods, Wright does not forget to warn his readers that the opponents of these methods are in grave danger of succumbing to the very evils they are attempting to destroy. It seems to be a law of life, Cross discovers, that to fight an enemy means fighting him on his own ground, and that in itself is a defeat. Perhaps he was staring right now at the focal point of history: "If you fought men who tried to conquer you in terms of total power you too had to use total power and in the end you became what you tried to defeat."

Although communism and existentialism have one thing in common—the denial of the existence of God—they are deadly enemies on many other counts. What, then, are the basic principles of existentialism in this novel? I shall limit myself to the discussion of three.

*First, the assumption that there is no God is necessary to the development of modern man, who must be self-reliant and self-sufficient and, above all, free.*

Sartre explains in his brief treatise on existentialism<sup>2</sup> that if God did exist, man could never be free. He would be forever hemmed in by a priori values already determined before his creation. He could always find excuses for his actions and seek to escape the consequences of them. But if God does not exist, there is no explaining things away by reference to fixed a priori values. Such a position condemns man to complete freedom. Once he enters the world, he *alone* is entirely responsible for everything he does.

When the dying Cross, who had killed four men during the few weeks of his new life and had in turn been shot by his Communist enemies, is asked by the district attorney why he had chosen to live as he had, replies: "I wanted to be free . . . to feel what I was worth . . . what living meant to me."

On an earlier occasion when Cross is discussing with his Communist acquaintances the backgrounds of modern thought, he says:

All of this brings us to one central, decisive fact: the consequences of the atheistic position of modern man, for most men today are atheists, even though they don't know it or won't admit it.

. . . Now what does this mean—that I don't believe in God? It means that I, and you too, can do what we damn well please on this earth. Many men have been doing just that, of course,

<sup>2</sup> *Existentialism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947).

for a long time, but they didn't have the courage to admit it.<sup>3</sup>

*Second, there is no reality beyond subjectivity. Man can be no more nor less than what he conceives himself to be.*

Sartre says: "Subjectivism means, on the one hand, that an individual chooses and makes himself; and on the other, that it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity. The second of these is the essential meaning of existentialism."

Wright makes Cross reach the following conclusion as he reasons with himself concerning his predicament: "Every man interprets the world in the light of his habits and desires."

In a more extended discussion with the district attorney, Cross, who speaks for Wright, declares:

God, the millions of prisons in this world! Men simply copied the realities of their hearts when they built prisons. They simply extended into objective reality what was already a subjective reality. Only jailers really believe in jails. Only men full of criminal feelings can create a criminal code.

*Third, there is no human nature. Each age develops according to dialectical laws, and what men are depends upon the age and not on a human nature.*

The existentialists argue that human nature could be the product only of a godlike Creator, who would conceive and create man according to a common specification. Since they deny God, they deny the possibility of the individual man being the product of a general concept in the mind of a Creator. Hence there can be no such thing as human nature.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Dostoevsky said, 'If God didn't exist everything would be possible.' That is the very starting point of existentialism. Indeed everything is permissible if God does not exist" (Sartre, *op. cit.* p. 27).

<sup>4</sup> Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.



Wright puts in the mouth of his protagonist the following speech:

We twentieth century Westerners have outlived the faith of our fathers; our minds have grown so skeptical that we cannot accept the old scheme of moral precepts which once guided man's life. In our modern industrial society we try to steer our hearts by improvised, pragmatic rules which are, in the end, no rules at all. If there are people who tell you they live by traditional values and precepts—as the English sometimes pretend—then they are either lying to you or to themselves.

To more from a Marxist position, such as *Native Son* represents, to the nearly opposite philosophy of existentialism in less than eight years is a difficult feat, even for the agile-minded Richard Wright. Consequently, one should not be surprised to find here and there in *The Outsider* undigested and contradictory bits of the new philosophy. For instance, how can an existentialist reconcile the following quotation from *The Outsider* with the atheistic doctrine of his philosophy: "Man is a promise that he must never break"? *A promise to whom?*

In his treatment of race relations Wright has also moved away from the methods of *Native Son*. Although the main character in *The Outsider* is a Negro, the novel cannot be classified as racial literature. It is primarily the presentation of the experiences of a man (race is incidental) who seeks to repudiate his common humanity, a man who, as Wright phrases it, has "wantonly violated every commitment that civilized men owe, in terms of common honesty and sacred honor, to those with whom they live."

Despite the nonracial design, however, Wright does not hesitate to condemn attitudes of racial intolerance and prejudice wherever they appear. But unlike the deadly seriousness of *Native Son*, these attacks are made by light irony and ridi-

cule. For instance, Cross, who is somewhat scholarly, having spent two years studying philosophy at the University of Chicago, sets out to obtain a false birth certificate by pretending to be the kind of Negro stereotype that the white clerks appreciate. When his turn comes to present his case, he says to the clerk in a plaintive querulous tone:

"He told me to come up here and get the paper."

The clerk blinked and looked annoyed. "What?"

"The paper, Mister. My boss told me to come and get it."

"What kind of paper are you talking about, boy?"

"The one that say I was born. . . ."

The clerk smiled, then laughed: "Maybe you weren't born, boy. Are you *sure* you were?"

Cross batted his eyes stupidly. He saw that he was making the poorly paid clerk happy; his pretense of dumbness made the clerk feel superior, white.

"Well, they *say* I was born. If I wasn't born I can't keep my job. That's why my boss told me to come here and get the paper."

Two hours later Cross had the duplicate birth certificate . . . and had left in the minds of the clerks a picture of a Negro whom the nation loved and of whom the clerks would speak in the future with contemptuous affection. Maybe someday I could rule the nation with means like this, Cross mused as he rode back to New York.

In the main, Wright appears to have concluded that the problems of racial justice and brotherhood are a part of the larger problems of human relations and that the most successful methods of attack are those directed on the wider front.

Although Wright's philosophical and racial horizons have expanded considerably since *Native Son*, his literary craftsmanship has shown no noticeable improvement. In fact, *The Outsider* is inferior to its predecessor in plot construction, organization, and emotional depth.



In *Native Son* coincidence plays no part in plot construction. Whatever happens is the result of causal relationships generated by the natural consequences of place, time, and environment. But in *The Outsider* the crucial incident (the subway wreck) which enables the protagonist to achieve a new identity is attended by a far-fetched coincidence which alone is responsible for the possibility of all later developments. *It just happened that one other Negro who resembled Cross "in color and build" was in the subway car and that this Negro, who was sitting across the aisle, was thrown against him by the force of the collision in such a manner that he (Cross) had to beat the lifeless head into an unrecognizable pulp in order to free himself from the wreckage. It was a coincidence, too, that Cross unconsciously left his overcoat so entangled with the lifeless body of the Negro victim that it became the mark of identification that proved to the world that Cross was "dead." Later in New York it just happened that Cross was near by when a typical Fascist and a typical Communist (both of whom Cross hated) became engaged in a violent physical battle and that, because of the peculiar situation, Cross was able to slip into the "locked" room unnoticed and administer death blows to each without himself being immediately suspected.*

The motivation in *Native Son* is natural and compelling. Bigger's first act of murder is accidental, and the second is the result of overpowering fear. But the motivation for the four murders committed by Cross is neither natural nor compelling. It lies outside the normal pattern of human psychology.

There are some long speeches in *Native Son*, speeches delivered by the attorneys at Bigger's trial. The courtroom is a

natural setting in which long-winded, one-sided oratory is customary. The eloquence is appropriate, for a verdict of life or death hangs upon the delicately balanced arguments. But in *The Outsider* the long, learned discussions on the origin, development, and functions of religions, governments, political parties, and economic systems carried on by Cross and District Attorney Houston and by Cross and his Communist antagonists have no natural setting. They seem forced and stagy. They appear to be part of an obvious scheme to drag in irrelevant lectures on special doctrines, whose outcome can have no possible effect on the lives of any of the characters.

The other stylistic qualities which have made all of Wright's books worthy literary experiences have suffered no diminution. The vivid diction, the effective sentence structure, and the pleasing rhythms are still predominant. His emotional control is more apparent than it was in the earlier novel. He declared after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Children* that he was through with sentimentality. He has kept that promise. There is an emotional toughness in *The Outsider* which exceeds the hardness of *Native Son*. One may curse and fume over the harrowing experiences of this book, but never weep.

In conclusion, it is only fair to emphasize that Wright has come a long way in the art of philosophic thought since *Native Son*. It may be that another thirteen years between novels will reduce the groping tension that now beclouds the mind of this talented writer. It may be that his next novel will be a fulfilment of the promise of *Uncle Tom's Children*, of *Native Son*, and of *Black Boy*.

# *The Unified Sensibility and Metaphysical Poetry*

A. E. MALLOCH<sup>1</sup>

SINCE 1921 very few discussions of metaphysical poetry have been able to avoid mention of the "unified sensibility." The term has been alternately a high tribute to the achievements of Donne, Herbert, Marvell, and Crashaw and an epitome of all that is most cryptic and pretentious in modern criticism. And accompanying this divided reaction has been the uncertainty as to whether the unified sensibility is a technical and descriptive term or whether it belongs to the vocabulary of general aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> The term "metaphysical" has occasioned a similar uncertainty (and for a longer period of time). There is a sense in which all poetry is metaphysical, but traditionally the word attaches to a school of seventeenth-century poets. Sometimes metaphysical poetry and poetry of the unified sensibility are regarded as one and the same thing, but this identification does not necessarily show the limits of the terms. This paper will try to suggest the limits of each term and to indicate the relation between them.

When Sir Herbert Grierson's anthology appeared in 1921, it was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* by T. S. Eliot, who called attention to the peculiar sensibility of the metaphysical poets.<sup>3</sup> This review was largely responsible

for popularizing the notion of the "unified sensibility"; but the notion had appeared and had been more fully explained in some of Eliot's earlier essays. A famous passage in the 1917 manifesto, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," describes the unified sensibility in action:

The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. . . .

There remains to define this process of depersonalization. . . . It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I therefore invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulfur dioxide. . . . When the two gases . . . are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

When the poet as person remains outside the creative process, when the poet's mind is the filament only, then he can boast of a unified sensibility. When the man who suffers (and Eliot uses the word in its technical sense) intrudes in the

<sup>3</sup> This paper is not concerned with Eliot's strictures on the sensibility of the later seventeenth-century poets. His particular critical judgments are not necessarily involved in the notion of the "unified sensibility."

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<sup>2</sup> For some remarks on the use of the term "sensibility" in twentieth-century criticism see F. W. Bateson, "Contributions to a Dictionary of Critical Terms. II. Dissociation of Sensibility," *Essays in Criticism*, I (1951), 302-12; also Eric Thompson and F. W. Bateson, "Critical Forum," *Essays in Criticism*, II (1952), 207-14.

creative process, the poem is stained with personality and the poet's sensibility is said to be dissociated. To praise the sensibility of a poet, then, is not to praise his knowledge or his personal sensitivity or the sublimity of the material he handles; it is to praise his mode of working.

The illustration of the catalyst implies a particular understanding of poetic creation, an understanding clearly at odds with any theories of poetry as self-expression. "Poet," as the Elizabethan critics constantly remind us, comes from a Greek verb meaning "to make." The activity of the poet is to make, to bring something into existence. But, since man does not create *ex nihilo*, it follows that the act of making is related to the act of cognition. From what the poet has learned emerges the perception which guides him in his making. Or, to put it another way, the act of cognition is the primary act of imitation. The poet's senses, imagination, and intellect represent (or imitate) those things which impress them: the sound of a typewriter, the smell of cooking, the works of Spinoza.<sup>4</sup> These cognitive acts are held in the memory, and, when they have afforded the poet a certain vision,<sup>5</sup> he then sets out to make from his chosen matter (words) what Eliot has called the "objective correlative," the verbal formula for the art emotion. The poet finds this correlative and so makes the poem, by retracing the acts of cognition, not this time to those objects or situations which first initiated them but to something

analogous to those objects and situations. It is in this process of retracing that the intellect comes to be immediately at the tips of the senses, and it is in the search for the analogous object that the poet exercises his talent for perceiving the similarity between dissimilar things, that talent which Aristotle regarded as the poet's most important. The working of the unified sensibility, then, is distinguished chiefly by the exact correspondence between the processes of learning and making. The poet slays the minotaur of appetite and volition and finds his way back through the cognitive labyrinth. Hence, when Eliot impugns the sensibility of Massinger, the specific point he makes is that Massinger's style of writing does not correspond to his mode of "perceiving, registering, and digesting impressions." The insistence on this correspondence is not peculiar to the criticism of Eliot. Arthur Hallam, in writing about the "poets of sensation," said:

We are therefore decidedly of opinion that the heights and depths of art are most within the reach of those who have received from nature the "fearful and wonderful" constitution which we have described, whose poetry is a sort of magic, producing a number of impressions, too multiplied, too minute, and too diversified to allow of your tracing them to their causes, because just such was the effect, even so boundless and bewildering, produced on their imaginations by the real appearance of Nature.<sup>6</sup>

And James Joyce wrote: "The artist, he imagined, standing in the position of mediator between the world of his experience and the world of his dreams—a mediator, consequently gifted with twin faculties, a selective and a reproductive faculty. To equate these faculties was the secret of artistic success."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> T. H. Vail Motter (ed.), *The Writings of Arthur Hallam* (New York, 1943), p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> *Stephen Hero* (London, 1944), p. 65. This insight, like so many of Joyce's, can be found in the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas *De anima*, Art. 13: "The human soul in a certain respect is all things by sensing and understanding."

<sup>5</sup> For Eliot the succession of cognitive acts requires a continual reordering (analogous to the reordering of the tradition of literature, which he describes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"). The experiences of the poet "are always forming new wholes"; hence Donne is said to be altogether present in every thought and feeling.

This understanding of the poetic process carries with it a view of artistic creation in general. Art imitates nature not by copying faithfully certain objects which the world of nature presents to the artist but by working in the way that nature works. The impersonal artist is an instrument in a natural process of creation, a free, conscious instrument but an instrument nonetheless. In a recent essay Eliot has emphasized this point and indicated its relevance to the problem of meaning. He is discussing the difference between the "permanent and the ephemeral in imaginative writing":

In the latter the author can know exactly what he meant, and if the audience does not get the thing that he was aware of or meaning to say, his attempt has failed. And because he had a definite purpose, a thesis to demonstrate, what he has written will cease to interest and excite as soon as the circumstances, in which he formulated that thesis, have changed. But in really creative writing, the author is making something which he does not understand himself. Only God understands the creature; in human creation humanity is only an instrument.<sup>8</sup>

All this and much more is involved in the notion of the "unified sensibility," a notion which belongs in the understanding of the poetic process, whether it is the process of a Chaucer, a Donne, a Wordsworth, or a Tennyson. Eliot, however, chose to notice the unified sensibility of a particular group of poets, and he chose for the reason that underlies all his critical interests, the bearing of those poets on contemporary poetic practice. In the metaphysicals he found a mechanism of

sensibility which could devour an enormous range of experience, a range as enormous as that which the twentieth-century poet must devour if he is to write at all. (He does not, however, say that the poet of today does or will use the same techniques as Donne or Crashaw.) A great many poets from all ages may be granted the praise of a unified sensibility; the distinctions among them are made according to the techniques they employed in constructing their poems. The term "unified sensibility" can bracket Donne and Spenser; the term "metaphysical," on the other hand, can differentiate them.

Johnson was the first to use the phrase "metaphysical poets"; but there are at least two earlier texts in which "metaphysics" or "metaphysical" is associated with a particular kind of poetry. Around 1630, Drummond of Hawthornden wrote in a letter to a friend: "In vain have some men of late, transformers of everything, consulted upon her [poetry's] reformation, and endeavoured to abstract her to metaphysical ideas and scholastic quiddities, denuding her of her own habits and those ornaments with which she hath amused the world some thousand years." In 1693, in his essay on the "Original and Progress of Satire," Dryden wrote that Donne "affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love." These passages agree in associating the word "metaphysical" with the reasoning of the schoolmen and in characterizing that reasoning as abstract and fine-drawn. This use of the word is common in Milton, who spoke variously of "metaphysical trifling" and the "metaphysical fume," and urged a "wholesome

works of "old Aquinas." See a passage in *De anima*, Art. 13, where Aquinas states that the agent intellect is related to the phantasms illuminated by it as an artificer is to the things made by his art. See also Sergei Eisenstein's remarks on the correspondence between cognition and creation in *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York, 1947), pp. 18, 30 ff.

<sup>8</sup> "The Chief Aims of Poetic Drama," *Adam International Review*, XVII, No. 200 (November, 1949), 16.



body of divinity without school terms and metaphysical notions." The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the word has been applied "with more or less of reproach to reasoning, ideas, etc. which are considered oversubtle, or too abstract." The *OED* notes also that the word has meant "surpassing what is natural or ordinary." This is certainly a meaning in the passage from Dryden, when "metaphysics" is opposed to "nature." And both these meanings are in Johnson's "Life of Cowley." Donne and Cowley are metaphysical because they were men of enormous learning who ransacked nature and art for "illustrations, comparisons, and allusions." But the learning is not their distinguishing feature. Their principal pursuit was the unexpected and the surprising, and, since "great things cannot have escaped former observation," these men chose to be subtle and analytic, and this constant analysis required for its raw matter a great body of learning.

The subtleties, the fine distinctions which Drummond, Dryden, and Johnson emphasize, are present because the characteristic technique of Donne and his school is dialectic, the dramatic action of composing and dividing. The schoolmen, who were the great manipulators of the fine distinction, relied almost exclusively on the disputed question (a miniature drama in itself) to expound their doctrines. And it was the schoolmen who assigned the dominant role in the trivium to dialectic.

The modes of dialectic in metaphysical poetry are numerous. Sometimes the poets, and especially Donne, exploit a specific and traditional, scholastic distinction—for example, the distinction between substantial and accidental existence:

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee  
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:

For I am every dead thing,  
In whom love wrought new Alchimie.  
For his art did expresse  
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,  
From dull privations and leane emptinesse:  
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot  
Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are  
not.

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,  
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing  
have;  
I, by loves limbecke, am the grave  
Of all, that's nothing.

It is common, too, to find the dialectic of speaker and hearer emphasized by a highlighting of the dramatic situation of the poem. In "The Flea" Donne even writes the action of the hearer into the poem:

Cruell and Sodaine, hast thou since  
Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?  
Wherein could this flea guilty bee,  
Except in that drop which it suckt from thee?

The dialectic of conversation between priest and God is a basic mode in Herbert's poems:

Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?  
He is a brittle crazie glasse:  
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford  
This glorious and transcendent place,  
To be a window, through thy grace.

One of the most celebrated modes of dialectic is the pun, and it is no accident that so many of Empson's illustrations are drawn from the metaphysicals. In a pun the dual applications of a word or phrase set up relations between themselves which are analogous to the relation between speakers in a dialogue:

When thy inconsiderate hand  
Flings ope this casement, with my trembling  
name,  
To looke on one, whose wit or land,  
New battry to thy heart may frame,  
Then thinke this name alive, and that thou thus  
In it offendst my Genius.

Again,

When we have run our Passions heat,  
Love hither makes his best retreat,



The *Gods*, that mortal Beauty chase,  
Still in a Tree did end their race.  
*Apollo* hunted *Daphne* so,  
Only that She might Laurel grow.  
And *Pan* did after *Syrinx* speed,  
Not as a Nymph, but for a reed.

Or:

No wonder if my time go thus  
Backward and most preposterous;  
Thou hast benighted me, thy set  
This Eve of blackness did beget,  
Who was't my day, (though overcast  
Before thou had'st thy Noon-tide past).

An extension of this mode of dialectic, and the most controversial feature of metaphysical poetry, is the conceit. Johnson's famous passage on the conceit begins by defining wit as "a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." When he goes on to say that in metaphysical poetry the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together, he implies that the conceit is an unjustified accentuation of one of these occult resemblances. He adduces an example from Cleveland:

The mod'rate value of our guiltlesse ore,  
Makes no man atheist, nor no woman whore:  
Yet why should hallow'd vestals sacred shrine  
Deserve more honour than a flaming mine?  
These pregnant wombs of heat would fitter be  
Than a few embers for a deity.  
Had he our pits, the Persian would admire  
No sun, but warm's devotion at our fire:  
He'd leave the trotting whipster, and prefer  
Our profound Vulcan 'bove that waggoner.  
For wants he heat? or light? or would have  
store?  
Or both? 'tis here: and what can suns give more?  
Nay, what's the sun, but in a different name,  
A coal-pit rampant, or a mine on flame!  
Then let this truth reciprocally run  
The sun's heaven's coalery, and coals our sun.

This is a good example for Johnson's purpose, but a score of metaphysical poems refute him and show that the terms of a conceit may exhibit a marked con-

naturality. Here, for example, is Crashaw's "Easter day":

Rise, Heire of fresh Eternity,  
From thy Virgin Tombe:  
Rise mighty man of wonders, and thy world  
with thee  
Thy Tombe, the universall East,  
Natures new wombe,  
Thy Tombe, faire Immortalities perfumed Nest.  
Of all the Gloryes Make Noone gay  
This is the Morne.  
This rocke buds forth the fountaine of the  
streames of Day.  
In joyes white Annals live this houre,  
When life was borne,  
No cloud scoule on his radiant lids no tempest  
lowre.

Life, by this light's Nativity  
All creatures have.  
Death onely by this Dayes just Doome is forc't  
to Dye;  
Nor is Death forc't; for may hee ly  
Thorn'd in thy Grave;  
Death will on this condition be content to Dy.

Critics of metaphysical poetry have attempted to describe the conceit in two ways, by reference either to the kind of terms brought together or to the quality of the relation between them.<sup>9</sup> But both methods are unsatisfactory. The first tries to measure by genus and species the distance between terms which are analogically united, and analogy is notoriously disrespectful to generic and specific boundaries. The second method, description according to relation, overlooks the fact that in analogy (as in the unified sensibility) the correspondence or relation is, strictly speaking, always the same. Two examples from Aristotle's *Poetics* will illustrate the point. Old age is the evening of life; the cup is the shield of Dionysus. In both, the relation is one of proportion; in fact, it is a proportion of proportions. As old age is to life, so is evening to the

<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, Milton Rugoff, *Donne's Imagery: A Study in Creative Sources* (New York, 1939); on the other, Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago, 1947).

day; as the cup is to Dionysus, so is the shield to Mars. The relation within each term (e.g., the relation of the cup to Dionysus) will be distinct, but, when that relation comes to be united with another, the union is not mathematical (2 is to 4 as 6 is to 12) but harmonic. The relations of the cup to Dionysus and of the shield to Mars, when contemplated together, are perceived to be "in tune."

This is not to say that description of conceits is impossible, for if analogy is not amenable to the two methods mentioned above, it is amenable to description by technique. Analogy may be exhibited in a number of different ways. The proportion may be stated: "My luve is like a red, red rose"; it can also be shown by mere juxtaposition, as when Chaucer juxtaposes the logical studies of the Clerk and the leanness of the Clerk and his horse. When we come to the metaphysicals, I would suggest that the special mark of their conceit is that they take an analogy and develop it with the kind of rigor proper to dialectic:

Whilst my Physitians by their love are growne  
Cosmographers, and I their Mapp, who lie  
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown  
That this is my South-west discoverie  
*Per fretum febris*, by these streights to die,

I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;  
For, though their currants yeeld returne to  
none,

What shall my West hurt me? As West and East  
In all flatt Maps (and I am one) are one,  
So death doth touch the Resurrection.

Is the Pacifique Sea my home? Or are  
The Easterne riches? Is *Jerusalem?*  
*Anyan*, and *Magellan*, and *Gibraltar*,  
All streights, and none but streights, are wayes  
to them,

Whether where *Japhet* dwelt, or *Cham*, or *Sem*.

For the schoolmen the technique of composing and dividing belonged to the order of concepts; when that dialectic technique is applied to the analogical order, we have what Eliot describes as the "re-

creation of thought into feeling," an act which corresponds to the sensuous apprehension of thought in the poet's act of cognition. Here, to use the words of Thomas Carew's elegy on Donne, the reader may judge by sense what fancy cannot reach.

Carew's elegy is full of observations on Donne's techniques and on the techniques of the metaphysicals generally. It may be valuable, therefore, as a final focus on these techniques to consider briefly the kind of poetry which Carew thought Donne had displaced. The contemptuous references to the tuned chime of language which charms the outward sense, to "soft melting Phrases," to the "train of gods and goddesses," to the "tales o' th' Metamorphoses," identify the poetry as that of the so-called "Spenserian" school. Quite apart from Carew's obvious preference, there is an important difference between the techniques of Donne and Spenser, a difference which is in some sense a difference between two basic traditions in the history of poetry.<sup>10</sup> Donne exploits the potentialities of language as instrument of communication and presents by verbal dialectic the dance of meaning. Spenser, on the other hand, exploits quite a different potential and creates a structure rich in plastic and visual effects; the internal relations of his poetry are wrought by a landscaping of these effects. And so the music of his work comprehends far more than just the melody of his lines. Donne shows no interest in the plastic and visual, and the sound of his lines is an echo of the mind composing and dividing.

In closing, then, I would suggest that the relation of the unified sensibility to metaphysical poetry is the relation of poetic process to poetic technique. Cer-

<sup>10</sup> See H. M. McLuhan, "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," *Essays in Criticism*, I (1951), 262-82, for some discussion of these two traditions.

tain techniques can validly be said to distinguish Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Marvell as a school (and there are significant differences within that school). The unification or dissociation of sensibility, on the other hand, is a judgment on a poet's mode of creation, whatever the nature of his techniques.

## *High Is Our Calling*

"Let us think of *quietly* enlarging our stock of true and fresh ideas. . . ."

MATTHEW ARNOLD

### PROLOGUE

High is our calling, Friends! To teach belief  
In God's ways (and those of businessmen)  
To a generation of war-weaned children,  
Old in tears, futility, and grief.  
"God's in his heaven? Like hell," they say. "The  
World's in one awful sorry mess;  
The answer, by a long shot, isn't yes  
Nor no . . . it's in between, it's maybe!"  
These we must teach—but not to think,  
To analyze, to ferret fact and find  
The economic missing link;  
These we must teach to be resigned  
To evil, status quo of normal stink;  
Give these the anodyne of meat and drink.

### I

This is Lit. 64. Ah, Literature, Life!  
Truth, flashed in code from a magic Mount. . . .  
"Yeah? That kind of truth is no-account;  
I'm here to learn a living; I've a wife  
And two kids and ninety bucks per  
For three more years. Life, Literature!"  
Truth, fictioned forth in forms that endure  
Time, though stone monuments and man  
Are dust and dry decay. . . . This is section "B". . . .  
"Life, Literature: a sermon, for free!  
Lissen to old know-it-all fan  
The breeze!"  
The first lesson will be  
*Beowulf*, Volume I, page three;  
Read it all tonight, if you can.

### II

You've read the lesson, I presume. . . .  
At any rate, let's see. . . . It's only right

That I should clarify, for you, the fight  
With Grendel, in Heorot's dining room. . . .

"So now he's teaching *us* to fight! That's a laugh!

The pot-bellied, white-skinned, mule-eared giraffe."

Mr. Anderson, you know what "Wyrd" is, do you not?

"Me?"

Yes.

"Well . . . odd? Queer? Half-shot?"

I thought so! You haven't read the notes.

You write W-Y-R-D forty times tonight

And tomorrow define *litotes*

In class, with textual examples. Right?

"Oh no! The good old Army game;

Things haven't changed, they're just the same!"

### III

Today we discover what you think

About our rugged ancestors. Take alternate

Seats, and write in Bluebooks, with ink—

Your fortunes are . . . Ha . . . in the hands of "Wyrd"  
(that's fate).

"Fortune's mighty Wyrd, no doubt!

Three years ago . . . a foxhole,

Wondering if I dare peek out . . .

Burrowing deeper, deeper . . . a mole. . . ."

List the major motifs of the poem *Beowulf*

And how they are characteristic . . .

"Wondering when things would cave in, engulf

Me and make me another statistic. . . ."

That's the last question, number four;

Best hurry, only a half hour more!

### IV

Let's see . . . ah yes, here it is: Pay attention!

I corrected your test papers last night.

Some were good, some poor—and *one*, a fright:

Stupid, insane beyond mention!

Mr. Anderson?

"Yes . . . *sir*?"

I'm speaking of you,

Please listen! I tried my best to teach

The major motifs of *Beowulf* through

Analogies I thought were within your reach.

You wrote this?

"What? . . . I guess so."

Well,

I never knew that 'Palm Trees were Wyrd

Against a Wyrd Lime sky that failed to jell.' . . .  
 Tell me, how old are you, where were you reared?  
 Where did you learn that 'Grendel's mere  
 Was a coral deep cave, lagooned in fear'?

## V

Mr. Anderson?

"Eh?"

Look up!

"I was thinking."

Thinking indeed . . . and high time it is, too;  
 Are you sure you weren't drinking  
 When you thought this test through?  
 What of *this*: the fight with the fire-drake,  
 That was the question. . . .

"To be or not to be extinguished. . . ."  
 And what did our Mr. Anderson take  
 The fire-dragon to be?

"A most honorable, distinguished  
 Jap behind a tree, pointing a river of flame  
 That flowed searing overhead. . . .  
 We played a friendly, sporting game,  
 He lost, he lost: he's dead."

I declare, I tire of trying to teach  
 Ideas, when ideas are beyond your reach!

## VI

Now then, Anderson, let's get things straight.  
 I called this conference, well, to see  
 Whether you've been making fun of me—  
 No . . . in a minute . . . first let me state  
 The issue. Right? All quarter long  
 While I've lectured you hung your head  
 And occasionally you hummed a song.  
 A sad song—and your eyes were dead  
 To what you saw, your ears to my words.  
 "A string of unconnected green birds  
 Across a green sky  
 Greenly fly."

Perhaps you can tell me. What's wrong inside?  
 "Green flies ate green and greenly died."

## VII

I reread your Bluebook; I feel that I know  
 Somehow, the things you were trying to say  
 About *Beowulf* and war: the colors that flow  
 From death, sunset, and human decay.  
 You see, that's poetry, imagistic, to be sure,



But hardly a cancer that's gone beyond cure.  
 I apologize, too, for blowing up in class  
 But, well, you see my point, don't you?  
 Anderson!

"Yes."

You know I can't pass  
 You this term. What are you going to do?  
 Under the circumstances, I'd advise  
 You to drop out of school for a while and size  
 Yourself up. You're heading for a breakdown.  
 Why don't you return to your home town?  
 "Eh?"

Your home town. Go home. Rest.  
 Now, about that other affair, the test.  
 Forget it! I'd like to keep your paper, though;  
 It's *poetry*. Damned if it hasn't begun to grow  
 On me! Who's teaching? Hey, Anderson?

"Johnny get your gun get your gun  
 Get your gun  
 Come and join the fun, join the fun. . . .  
*Join the fun!*  
 You slick phrase-rattling windbag,  
 I've half a notion to drag  
 Your fat carcass screaming  
 Down the stairs.

Who cares?"

Anderson!

"Get your gun, gun, gun. . . ."

### VIII

Dean Hudson, Here's a poem I dashed off, trying  
 To catch the feeling of fright and death;  
 The disconnected imagery represents a man dying,  
 Breathing fire when he seeks to breathe breath.  
 (The war? You know I had to stay home and teach  
 Cadets the niceties of military etiquette,  
 But I'd have liked to get in, you bet!)  
 Imagine, if you can, storming a beach  
 At daybreak . . . minus zero hour . . . a flat sea,  
 (Green, of course,) a flat green sun, a green sky. . . .  
 What a heroic and thrilling way to die!  
 What's that? I think so too. The image: *greenly*,  
 Fits the scene and fits the sense of expectation. . . .  
 Oh yes, I've been assured an early publication!

H. L. ANSHUTZ

## *New Critic and Old Scholar*<sup>1</sup>

RANDALL STEWART<sup>2</sup>

IN AN attempt, recently, to take the pulse of our profession, I sent out a list of queries to a number of colleagues who are at once distinguished and representative. I received replies from thirty-four persons,<sup>3</sup> among whom "old scholars" and "new critics" are represented about equally, though in a few cases such a classification would do some violence to the persons concerned. I want to express here my thanks to those who took the trouble to reply to my questionnaire and especially to the goodly number who replied with meticulous care and at considerable length.

I can think of no better way of going about the business in hand than by running through the questions, summarizing and excerpting answers, and now and then venturing a comment of my own.

Question No. 1: "Is there a feud between historical scholars and new critics?" Here are some answers:

And how!

There has been something of a feud.

<sup>1</sup> Read at the American Literature luncheon of the Modern Language Association in Boston, December 29, 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Professor of English in Brown University.

<sup>3</sup> Replies were sent by the following: John W. Aldridge, George Arms, Leonard B. Beach, Walter Blair, Edward A. Bloom, John F. Butler, Richard Chase, Harry Hayden Clark, Reginald L. Cook, Edward H. Davidson, Norman Foerster, Richard H. Fogle, John C. Gerber, James D. Hart, Robert B. Heilman, Leon Howard, Merritt Y. Hughes, Robert D. Jacobs, Howard M. Jones, Fred B. Millett, Kenneth B. Murdock, William Van O'Connor, Roy Harvey Pearce, Frederick A. Pottle, Ralph L. Rusk, Robert E. Spiller, Robert Wooster Stallman, Floyd Stovall, Hyatt Howe Waggoner, Richard M. Weaver, Carl J. Weber, Ray B. West, Jr., George F. Whicher, and Napier Wilt.

There is something of a feud between some historical scholars and some new critics.

Generally, yes, there is a feud.

One answer takes a cheerful view of the conflict: "In terms of intellectual vitality, I consider this feud a good thing." Another answer takes a dark view: "Academic civil war between critics and scholars is an internecine strife which, in my opinion, is doing more damage to the reputation of humane studies than any other single thing today." One person quarreled with the choice of the word "feud": "There is certainly no feud," he said, "in the sense that either side is out to keep shooting until all the others are dead."

Question No. 2: "Are there signs of *rapprochement*?" Answers range from "Yes" to "No."

"Yes," writes a new critic; "see extremely important symptomatic statement by R. P. Blackmur 'The Lion and the Honeycomb,' *Hudson Review*, winter, 1951." One correspondent offers as a basis for hopefulness his preparation of a textbook "which uses the *Understanding Poetry* approach but merges it with the historical approach, chronological arrangement, attention to the poet's work as a whole, discussion of idiom in relation to milieu, etc." Another reply expresses equal certainty that *rapprochement* is far away, if not actually unattainable: "New critics become mythographers; historical scholars become explicators. But essentially they have not got together; they do not work toward a common theory of

literature." And one reply (from an outstanding mediator between the two schools) flatly predicts that the new-critical point of view "is going to overcome" the historical.

Question No. 3: "What effect has the new criticism had on undergraduate teaching? On the conduct of graduate seminars? On graduate theses?"

There seems to be general agreement that there has been a radical change in undergraduate teaching. One of our pioneer historical scholars declares: "I'm glad that criticism is playing a larger part than before. It has, for one thing, sent us back to a more determined study of texts." A distinguished neohumanist says of the change: "Great improvement. More emphasis on great literature and, in any case, on the text as opposed to facts surrounding the text." A new critic inclines to cautious understatement: "There has been some tendency to study literary structures more fully and not to study genetic problems exclusively." One informant believes that the new criticism "has tended to encourage the Socratic method in teaching and to discourage straightaway lecturing." Another observes, "There does seem to be less lecturing from old notes." A sweeping change is indicated, one person points out, by the large new crop of textbooks "aimed at the critic-, rather than the scholar-, teacher."

The opinion is expressed in several replies that the change has been slower in reaching graduate courses, but even here, and in graduate theses also, the change, though less marked, is nevertheless evident. It is reported that at one institution "graduate students in the last two or three years have written a greater number of critical term papers than ever before"; at another institution "graduate students are undoubtedly

turning in larger and larger numbers to critical subjects"; at still another "almost all M.A. theses since 1949 have been critical ones." One informant expresses the opinion that "in midwestern universities graduate courses are so completely in the control of traditional scholars that graduate teaching still follows the patterns of years ago," but this seems to be a minority report. Another observer, also in the Midwest, reports that graduate students are much taken with the new criticism and "flock to an institution where some critic of reputation is reigning."

Question No. 4: "Does the new criticism discourage historical research?"

Not long ago I was zestfully describing to a colleague at another institution a research project which I have been trying to set up at Brown. Our Harris Collection of American Poetry is, I suppose, the largest collection of American verse in existence—it runs to over a hundred thousand titles. One of our Ph.D. students recently read all the volumes published in the 1840's (about two thousand) and produced a dissertation called "Themes in American Verse, 1840-49," which struck me as in many ways the most informative dissertation I had ever read—as how could it very well keep from being, based as it was upon hundreds of volumes which no historian or scholar or critic had ever used before? Two students are now digging in other decades—"Operation Harris," we call it—one in the early 1800's, and the other in the 1890's. "Don't you see," I wound up triumphantly, "before many years we shall have the most thorough and systematic survey of nineteenth-century American verse ever made, revealing all sorts of new facets, and what place in all the world more suitable for such a monu-

mental achievement than Brown, the home of the Harris Collection?"

My friend gave me a melancholy look. "I couldn't find nowadays at our university," he said, "a graduate student who would be interested in a project of that kind, a project, that is, in which the historical motive is so dominant." The reply made me wonder whether indeed historical research in the literary field may be going out of fashion.

It is encouraging, however, to see that most answers—many from new critics—deny that the new criticism discourages historical research. Here are a few samples:

It would be disastrous for students of literature to feel they can read intelligently without a highly developed historical sense.

One hears the term "sterile antiquarianism" with increasing frequency. But the new critics themselves embark with considerable enthusiasm in antiquarian research when the literature in question is exciting to them. For example, they engage in minute historical research when metaphysical poetry is in question, though they disparage what looks like the same method when applied to romantic poetry.

Among the superficial, the new criticism has led to a disrespect for historical scholarship, but at its best it has given historical scholarship an angle of vision that ought to result in a more eager search for historical knowledge.

In view of the impression which some of us have had that the new criticism tends to divorce literature from history, I find these replies—and others of a similar purport—reassuring. The following response, however, possibly gets closer to the crux of the matter: "How can the new criticism discourage research except by doing its own job so well that many people become interested in doing that kind of job?" If this view indicates the true state of affairs, then historical research is not about to be exterminated on principle but is merely in danger of

being eclipsed, perhaps only temporarily, by a more glamorous rival.

Question No. 5: "Is much of the scholarship in which an older generation had complete faith regarded as worthless by the new critics?"

(The answers make it clear that everyone appreciates the fact that scholarly groundwork in texts and linguistics is indispensable and that much of the older scholarship has been concerned with these matters.)

What I had in mind, especially, in such a question was the kind of scholarship which was very popular in my own graduate-school days in the 1920's. In those halcyon times a young scholar's reputation was made if he managed to dig up a good source. *The Road to Xanadu*, as everyone of my generation will testify, was widely regarded as the supreme example of what literary scholarship at its very best could accomplish. Faith in the efficacy of sources was certainly a leading article in the scholar's creed. Research in the American field began, in the 1920's, with the emphasis on sources, for that was the current fashion. Many of us can recall old tables of contents in our journal, *American Literature*, which offered such titles as "The Sources of 'The Gray Champion'" and "A New Source for 'The Pit and the Pendulum.'"

Whether from the new-critical influence, or some other, I find my enthusiasm for this kind of learning somewhat less than formerly, and I almost never nowadays ask my students to look up articles of this kind. When my class was recently reading *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, I turned to Killis Campbell (for whose work I have the greatest respect) and found that Poe had drawn upon a report made to Congress by his friend



J. N. Reynolds on a projected Antarctic expedition and upon Captain Benjamin Morrell's *Narrative of Four Voyages to the South Sea*. I dutifully relayed this information to the class, but somehow we were all left a little cold by it. What we wanted most to discover, I suppose, was the meaning of Poe's strange symbolic tale, and the fact that he had drawn upon other works for some of his raw material seemed not very relevant to that central problem.

Here is one answer to my question from a new critic:

The crux of the new-critical position is that a work of art cannot be reduced back to its source, that you have to distinguish between the creative process or source and the framed created meaning. The error of the historical scholars was in identifying the meaning of the source with the meaning of the work, and the new-critical position is that the difference is absolute.

And here is a somewhat similar answer from another new critic:

I suppose this is true [i.e., that the new critics regard much of the older scholarship as worthless], but isn't this because of the old scholar's faith in research as a means of determining the meaning of a text—a faith which few modern critics share? In so far as this distinction is valid, it is crucial. Actually, however, the best scholars probably never consciously held such beliefs.

Well, I don't know. I seem to recall that a very great historical scholar once worked very hard and eruditely to prove that the meaning of Falstaff was to be found in the tradition of the *miles gloriosus*.

Question No. 6: "To what extent are the old specialisms being wiped out? Do departments no longer seek a Shakespeare specialist, or an eighteenth-century authority, or an American Renaissance man, but critically trained persons

who can range over the whole literary field?"

This question might have stemmed from Wellek and Warren, but actually it was suggested by such a book as *The Well Wrought Urn*, where the chapters deal, apparently with equal authority, with works drawn from many different periods. The question is of considerable practical importance to the younger members of our profession. A young assistant professor asked me the other day with a good deal of earnestness, "What kind of scholarly and/or critical writing would the department like to see me do?" I was not able to give an unequivocal answer. A bright young man, a former student of mine now teaching in the West, to whom I sent a copy of my questionnaire, wrote on this question: "If you know of any departments seeking these Critical Rangers, please put me in touch with them. I would like, someday, to qualify for a job in one of them."

But to look at some of the answers:

Criticism is now a specialism. Departments of which I know something look for young critics just as they look for young men in the eighteenth century, etc.

Despite our rather considerable interest in criticism, we still look for the old type of specialist: the Shakespeare man, and so on. We also have new categories. We look for a good modern critic, and we are interested in a man who can teach the history of criticism. And, as a result of our creative writing program, we look for men who can teach poetry-writing and fiction-writing. I'd say, in short, that the old categories have not been wiped out but that new ones have been added.

And this from a departmental chairman who is a new critic:

I have just been through a long search for new people, and we always started with the assumption that a good man would be a specialist in a field. The one man in our department who was rather inclined to scoff at



that idea as old-fashioned happens to have no time at all for the new criticism.

And so, paradox is piled on paradox. It seems that my young friend who would like to be a "Critical Ranger" will have to wait a while, though he may be justified in deriving encouragement from the following report from a small New England college:

A distinction should be made between *colleges* and *universities*. Universities still feel a legitimate need to have a corps of scholars who, among them, cover the major linguistic and literary fields. Colleges, however, are increasingly looking for men whose interests range not only over one literature but several literatures, or philosophy, or one of the arts, distinct from literature.

Question No. 7: "Is biography no longer useful as an aid to literary interpretation?" Here are a few answers:

Biography seems to be de-emphasized—true. And perhaps such a shift is healthy. Too many teachers for too many years have been content to tell the life-story of a writer as an easy escape from coming to grips with the poem, the novel, the essay. If the new critics have had any effect here, then I applaud their influence.

I don't believe biography has ever aided literary interpretation as far as the individual work of art *qua* work of art is concerned; or rather, more precisely, it has nothing to do with evaluation, and usually not much to do with interpretation, of the individual work.

I'd say that biography is treated more functionally than it used to be, though on the whole it probably receives less attention than it used to.

It would probably be more accurate to say that we are now beginning to learn how to make critical use of biographical materials, though cautiously and only in special cases.

The new-critical lesson, that a poem is anonymous, has been well learned by many of us; we don't confuse historically definable intention with textually analyzable achievement; at least, we try not to. And we return to a respect for biographical study, as the study of what it was to be an author.

This last answer, which stresses the anonymity of the literary work, suggests a revolution to my generation, because biographies used to lean heavily upon supposedly autobiographical passages in imaginative works, and we were taught in college and graduate school to be on the lookout for such passages in our reading. It was, I suppose, a romantic assumption of the nineteenth century that a simple correspondence existed between the life and the works, that Shakespeare must have been a lot like Hamlet, that Hawthorne must have been a lot like Arthur Dimmesdale. Even recently, a biography of Hawthorne which showed Hawthorne to have been not at all like Arthur Dimmesdale was rejected by one reviewer on the grounds that "the Hawthorne of this book could not have written *The Scarlet Letter*." To which the most suitable reply is, "He did."

Lesser works may not achieve anonymity, but I take some comfort (I hope it is not entirely mistaken) from the discovery, or rediscovery, of the anonymity of the great works—a rediscovery which dates for many of us from John Crowe Ransom's now-classic essay on *Lycidas*, "A Poem Nearly Anonymous." The great work, then, is anonymous, or nearly so, and biography is biography, showing us "what it was to be an author." Well, this separation appears, or appeared, to be a comfortable one on both sides. For my own peace of mind, I could hope that it might have proved lasting. But, like many separations, it may be a question as to how permanent this one is going to be. Those who separate with a strong mutual feeling of good riddance sometimes have a way of gravitating together again, for better or for worse. I am more sorry than otherwise to have to report that a few of my replies (which come from persons who seem

to be closely in touch with the latest symptoms) hint that the party of the first part and the party of the second part have been seen in each other's company a good deal recently, and their friends are predicting that they will soon be back in bed together. But here are the bulletins, and you can judge for yourself:

Psychoanalytical studies seem to be going strong.

For a new critic of sorts—though a too Freudian sort for my taste—who would reinstate biography, see Leslie Fiedler, *Archetype and Signature*, *Sewanee Review*, spring, 1952.

Among those descended from new critics, biography seems to be coming back, as they seek to absorb historical scholarship into their mode of operation. . . . What happens, however, is that the text, known new-critically, becomes an aspect of the personality of the author, known mythically, as a culture hero.

It looks, in other words, as if we might return—under whatever disguises—to interpreting the works in the light of the biography, and writing the biography in the light of the works. The relationship may be incestuous, but it seems to be fated.

Question No. 8: "Is there a trend toward delocalization? If so, might one result be that a course, say, in American writers would have little relation to America as such?" Here are some replies:

The history-of-ideas approach has abstracted our American authors from their cultural setting more efficiently and drastically than the new criticism is likely to do.

The answer to your question is the growth and extension of work in American Civilization, the founding of the American Studies Association, and the increase in subscriptions to *American Quarterly* from around two hundred to over seven hundred in two years.

There is undoubtedly delocalization taking place in courses called "Understanding Poetry" and "Understanding Fiction" and so on, but I'd

hesitate to say that this tendency extends very strongly into other courses.

A course in literary analysis would not and could not be a course in American literature on a historical basis.

I must confess that I have had the suspicion that the new-critical methodology might have the effect named in the question. The bit of evidence which chiefly prompted this query was a course given in a neighboring institution a few years ago which was called "The American Novel," and which consisted entirely—so my informants told me—of the analysis of fictional structures. The course, that is to say, ought to have been called "The Analysis of Fictional Structures"; the novels could just as well have been English or French; the course had no palpable relation to America as such. If the history-of-ideas approach may lead to a philosophical abstraction of the literature from its time and place, then it would seem that the new-critical approach may lead to an aesthetic abstraction. I shall return presently to the relation of our courses to American Studies programs, since my next, and last, question, also has a bearing on this connection.

Question No. 9: "Is there a tendency to teach fewer pieces, to spend one's strength on a comparatively few congenial texts, and to slight, or omit, historically important works if they are unsuitable to a particular kind of analysis? Under the new-critical dispensation, for example, might a writer like Cooper be neglected, although his historical importance is very great?"

One of the most distinguished of our older scholars makes this observation: "I note that a good deal of modern criticism finds itself completely imbecile when it is confronted by work that is simple and good." A young scholar who has also

done some good critical work defends the use of fewer pieces:

I am no new critic, but I confess that I believe in the efficacy of giving a few works as much time as is possible and reasonable. In the Hawthorne seminar we spend four two-hour periods on *The Scarlet Letter*, and in the Melville seminar we spend five two-hour periods on *Moby Dick*.

*The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick* are certainly masterpieces which reward prolonged study. The only demurrer that I should feel disposed to enter is this: after such liberal allotments of the student's time to the recognized masterpieces of fiction have been made, how much time (how much of the student's time, that is) is left for the great social novelists—for Cooper, Simms, Howells, Frederic, Norris, and others of their kind?

It seems to me that it is a matter of concern to us if the new-critical method is likely to produce a kind of course which will not satisfy the aims and objectives of the work in American Civilization, especially in view of the fact that our courses are usually required of students enrolled in that program. I am merely raising the practical professional question as to whether, in view of this alliance, we are as free as teachers of English literature—who are involved in no corresponding obligation—to follow a purely aesthetic procedure.

One of the youngest and most distinguished of the new critics (or perhaps I should say, of those descended from the new critics) asserts roundly in his reply to the present question: "Literature has never been a trustworthy source of information about the times in which it was

produced. One might better turn to history." I confess to finding such a view a little disquieting. I had supposed that one, for example, could understand the Mississippi Valley of the mid-nineteenth century better from *Huckleberry Finn* than from all the history books ever written. I still believe this to be true. And, in any case, I should deplore a procedure which would weaken the role of American Literature in a program of studies whose great purpose is to give a better understanding of our cultural heritage.

I have finished my nine questions and have brought forward, with the help of collaborators, a variety of answers. Whatever my follies on this occasion, one folly cannot justly be charged against me: namely, that of trying to settle anything. I have tried to settle nothing. I have tried merely to explore some of the issues which are forcing themselves upon our attention.

This paper obviously has no conclusion, except that ours is a time of ferment and change. We have looked together at some of the trends and at some of the differences of opinion which seem to divide us. The trends are challenging. The differences of opinion add vitality to our profession and zest to our daily lives. The differences, moreover, do not really divide us, for we are all profoundly united by a common creed: by our belief in the importance of literature and by our belief in the importance of man. These articles of faith—the importance of literature and the importance of man—are articles of sufficient magnitude and power not only to bind us together but to save the world.

## Reading Is Feeling

FRANK TOWNE<sup>1</sup>

Just as my fingers on these keys  
Make music, so the selfsame sounds  
On my spirit make a music, too.

Music is feeling, then, not sound. . . .

WALLACE STEVENS

IN SPITE of much that has been written to discourage such a view, the signs are all too evident—in the classroom, in book reviews, in the most well-intentioned criticism and scholarship—that literature is still generally thought of as the sugar-coated pill which would function equally well, though at the cost of salability, without the coating. The task of the critic becomes one of dissolving the sugared integument and laying bare the efficacious core, of liberating the expository message that he conceives to be locked up in passages of description and narrative and dialogue—and then, perhaps, of evaluating the message in terms of his own philosophy. He reduces *Paradise Lost* to an illustration of Milton's concept of Christian principles, *The Faerie Queene* to its moral or political allegory, *The Return of the Native* to a study of the vagaries of chance.

This is all very well as ethics or metaphysics or social history, and there is no denying that such practice has been encouraged by some of the writers whose novels and poems we value most. But what, except indirectly, one may be permitted to ask, does it have to do with literature? How shall we square with our reasoned philosophy, the fruit of our re-

flection, the emotions that we actually feel in the course of our reading—our apprehension for Satan's safety and success as he approaches the gates of Hell, our secret hope that Guyon will succumb to the lubricity of the maidens bathing in the pool, our exasperation with the meddling of Mrs. Yeobright? It is these feelings that constitute the literary experience; and an exploration of such feelings, consequently, would seem to be the proper task of the literary critic. Consideration of theme—of philosophical or moral or social import—on the contrary, *follows* this experience and is not a part of it.<sup>2</sup> Frequently, as I have tried to illustrate, it seems at variance with it.

Yet how little all this is understood. How critics, even the best of them, ignore the literary experience—the actual effect of the work upon them as they read—and glue their attention to some idea which, upon reflection, they have discovered the work to be an exposition

<sup>2</sup> In so far as a statement of theme made by a writer or his characters controls the emotions of the reader in the course of his reading, consideration of it is, of course, a part of the literary experience. What I refer to at this point, however, is the reader's reflection upon the work in an attempt to make it yield up a "message" or "meaning." Since this activity is unrelated to the artistic experience, it seems to me doomed to failure if its purpose is to lay bare the significance of a work of art.

<sup>1</sup> The State College of Washington.



of. The problems that lie at the center of much that passes for criticism of literature today, it seems clear, could be discussed (perhaps more effectively) without reference to literature at all. They are generally problems in sociology, history, philosophy, or psychology, and the piece of literature under consideration becomes a mere illustration of a problem or its solution. In this capacity it can frequently be replaced by a brief summary, without any danger to the effectiveness of the discussion, and a person who has never read the work itself may be thoroughly competent to discuss the matters of which it treats. Nor is it undesirable that such discussions should take place. They have their value in opening our minds to matters concerning which we should not remain in ignorance. But to suppose that they are discussions of literature is surely misguided thinking. They are discussions of things about which literature is written.

It would be a mistake, of course, to suggest that critics who devote themselves to these matters are never concerned with emotion. The objection is that the emotion they ask us to share is cosmic, arising from general principles rather than from our direct imaginative apprehension of particular human experiences. When, for example, we are moved to pity and fear by the spectacle of the Emperor Jones in flight, those emotions are the direct result of our dramatic or literary experience, of our contact with the play. But whether we withdraw our pity after reasoning that Jones's fate is well deserved or, being of a different school of thought, seek to palliate his offenses by making him out a creature of heredity and environment for which he cannot be held responsible, we do so not on the basis of our literary experience but on the basis of our meta-

physics. Our criticism centers in the problem of determinism, a matter that can be discussed by those who do not know the play as well as by those who do, and the emotion we experience arises not from the play but from our espousal or rejection of a philosophy that exists quite independent of it. If we would have literary, as distinguished from philosophic or social, criticism, we ought to reflect, not on the nature of the universe, but on the peculiar nature and combination of emotions to which the reading of a particular piece of literature gives rise.

The distinction I have been making is well reflected in the apparent discrepancy that some people have noticed between the novels of William Faulkner and the speech of acceptance that he delivered on being awarded the Nobel prize. Few literary experiences can be more depressing than that of moving through the world that Mr. Faulkner has created for us. Yet his acceptance speech is full of hope and of honest, not facile, optimism. Such a discrepancy can be explained, I think, only by reference to the distinction between the emotions aroused by the reading of a piece of literature and the emotions aroused by our reflections upon it. In retrospect, some of Faulkner's novels are not depressing. As we think back upon *Intruder in the Dust*, for example, we become aware of the note of hope and of high morality that informs the acceptance speech. But can this be said of the reading experience itself? There are those for whom even *The Unvanquished*, with all the nobility of its characters and the moral and social victory of its conclusion, is a depressing book.

On the other hand, some of the novels of Ernest Hemingway in which characters find themselves in situations of irremediable hopelessness are not un-



pleasant in the reading. In *The Sun Also Rises*, for example, the love of Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley, which can never be consummated, is hopeless in itself and becomes, perhaps, a symbol of the general futility of life. In our reflections, consequently, we decide that the book exudes pessimism; and as we re-examine it, we find more and more reason to think so. But the reading did not affect us in this manner. We were introduced through the senses and mind of Jake to the gay, if empty, society of Americans and British in Paris, but not kept in it long enough for its emptiness to pall. We were taken out with him into the fresh air of the Basque country on a fishing expedition. We were swept up with him into the crescendo of excitement at the fiesta in Pamplona. We were set down lightly with him by the seashore in San Sebastian. The whole novel plays upon our emotions like music, and the experience is a delight. It is only in the coldness of our afterthoughts that we declare the book a document of post-war pessimism and disillusion—the manifesto of a lost generation.

Noticing this discrepancy, Mr. Philip Young speaks of the "gaping cleavage here between manner and message, between joy in life and a pronouncement of life's futility."<sup>3</sup> But Hemingway, as a matter of fact, makes no pronouncement, unless his title be considered one; he merely presents a group of characters in a series of situations. The pronouncement is Mr. Young's, made as he reflected on the novel, not as he read it. And his awareness of a cleavage between manner (perceived as he read) and message (perceived as he reflected) rests on an unproved assumption: that joy in life and a sense of life's futility are necessari-

ly incompatible. It is worth noting that a reading of Ecclesiastes, from which Hemingway took his title, does not leave one suicidally depressed; for many it is an ennobling experience. If *The Sun Also Rises*, then, gives us a feeling of the joy in life, shall we not say that that is what it is about, even if the shadow of futility overhangs it? How can the message of a novel, except in reflection, differ from its manner? The manner *is* the novel. The effect the novel produces on us *is* its message. And that effect is felt, not in reflecting, but in reading. In a piece of literature manner and message are one. When we forget this, the message that we claim to elicit from a story is always elicited from our thoughts concerning the story, not from the reading experience itself. And the result is vicious, for we are robbed of that peculiar understanding which it is the power of literature to give us. Our reflections about cleavage between manner and message obscure what we have been feeling all along as we read—that joy in life can and does exist in the shadow of a sense of life's futility.

Whether it was Mr. Hemingway's intention to show this compatibility I do not know, but his intention is hardly to the point. A reader is ordinarily concerned not with what an author intended to write but with what he has, in fact, written. A concern for message as distinguished from manner inevitably leads to the destruction of a literary work—to a search for external indications of what its author was attempting to do and, consequently, to a study of the man rather than to a study of what he wrote. It neglects our perception of the subtle amalgam of humor and pathos in *Don Quixote* to puzzle over the satire gone astray, the derision of Cervantes turned to affection in mid-course. It causes us

<sup>3</sup> Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway* (New York, 1952), p. 59.

to ignore the significance of whatever emotion the spectacle of *Hamlet* arouses in us, in order to remark that Shakespeare was unable to impose his desired motive (as conceived by us) on the old play that he was revising, and to talk about objective correlatives, lamenting what the play fails to do instead of allowing ourselves to become aware of what it does. It makes of literature a vast guessing game and of every masterpiece a failure.

If we are to reflect on literature, should we not give our attention to the effect it produces in the reading? Not that such reflection is at all necessary. The unthinking reader of *The Sun Also Rises* experiences the compatibility of joy and futility without ever articulating that experience. And that is perhaps enough for any reader to do. If there is to be reflection, however, shall it not be reflection on the nature of our contact with the book, leading, at best, to some kind of articulation (it can never even approach perfection) of the emotions aroused in us as we read—emotions that no paraphrase or discussion can arouse—and of the significance of those emotions? Only reflection of this sort will lead us to the kind of understanding that it is the peculiar glory of literature to be able to give us—an understanding of ourselves. As long as we forget this, we shall never learn anything from literature that we could not learn a great deal better from a textbook in philosophy or psychology.

Literature, it may be presumed, is an art, and the peculiar character of the literary experience—the experience, that is, of reading literature—has much in common with the character of other artistic experiences, whether of painting, sculpture, music, or the dance. It is an experience in which philosophic thought, if any, emerges *through* the emotion to

which the experience gives rise, not collaterally with it. In other words, a good reader of literature will not, as Mr. Norman Foerster has urged, engage in two kinds of reading, which he calls “feeling the book” and “thinking the book”;<sup>4</sup> he will feel the book and then perhaps think about what he has felt.<sup>5</sup> At the stage of thinking, he is, of course, no longer a reader but a philosopher meditating on his reading experience. When one reads Keats’s “To Autumn,” there is little to engage his thoughts, even if he wishes to “think” the poem. But if he gives himself over to the joy of “feeling” it, he will have something to think about when he has finished. He may possibly reflect on the calmness and serenity of spirit which the poem induces in him, and he may conclude that here, as in reading Sophoclean tragedy, he is in the presence of high morality—simpler, because the emotions aroused are much less powerful and much less involved, but achieving in its own way something of the catharsis that we ask of the greatest art. If looked at in this way, a poem that is one of the least intellectual in the English language is felt to give us an understanding of the human mind and spirit that can be supplied by no philosophic statement, however complete. It is this kind of understanding that we should expect of the arts.

What, then, are the bounds of literature? Can it not be said that any work, using language as its medium, which gives us understanding through an arous-

<sup>4</sup> Donald A. Stauffer (ed.), *The Intent of the Critic* (Princeton, 1941), p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> I do not, of course, nor does Mr. Foerster, in using the word “think,” refer to the kind of mental activity that enables us to understand words and syntax. That, quite obviously, must precede both “feeling” and “thinking,” as the words are used here.

ing of the emotions is a piece of literature? The field of historiography is littered with the carcasses of books no longer esteemed by historians but of which some few gleanings have been gathered into our literary anthologies. Surely, we do not preserve them because we prize what is called their "intellectual content" or because we value their service as indexes of curious ideas once entertained, but because they move us as we read them and thereby give us a joy and understanding which are the province of literature rather than of history. It is the same with certain philosophers. If we are to credit some of our contemporaries, Plato is today in a similar position. As for Emerson, his work has been preserved as literature rather than as philosophy almost from the start. And the preservation of even so recent a thinker as Santayana seems to be devolving upon departments of literature—as he might have wished. Yet faculties of literature have not constituted themselves charnel houses for the deposition of all bones exhumed and rejected from the philosophic graveyard; they do not accept all and sundry, but demand a certain literary acceptability in the candidate for translation. They accept him on grounds that are not those of the philosopher. Why, then, do they insist on treating him as a philosopher after they get him? It is an unseemly spectacle for students of literature to snatch such easy game as a skeleton that the philosophers have allowed to molder in quiet neglect, clamp it in the pillory, and take pot-shots at it through their own unsteady philosophic sights. If a select company of thinkers

who might otherwise succumb to time are to be preserved for the literary excellence of their work, shall we not as students of literature focus our attention upon that excellence rather than upon their philosophic shortcomings? Emerson filters and fibers the blood; Plato and Santayana calm it. And they do this whether or not we believe in an oversoul or ideas or essences. Such is their *literary* function. It is not true or false; it simply is.

If men who at one time have been thought of as philosophers cannot withstand attack, how much less fruitful will be the search for significant philosophic doctrine in the works of men and women whom we have never thought of except as creative artists. If we wish to be students of philosophy—and it is a noble calling—we should do well to enter the temple with the Spinozas and the Kants, the Humes and the Comtes, rather than to remain on the parvis, decrying Whitman or preaching D. H. Lawrence. If the literary artist has any claim to our attention, it is that he does something for us that the philosopher and the historian and the sociologist and the psychologist—unless they are also literary artists—do not do. It is that he does something ineffable, something irreducible to paraphrase, something that can be discussed—in what inadequate language!—only as an effect produced upon us. This effect is not achieved by an exposition of doctrine. If it were, Aristotle and Adam Smith would be among our greatest literary artists, and we should be taking our old shoes to the cobbler, wrapped up in pages of the *Odyssey*.

## *The Humanities in General Education*

RICHARD C. SNYDER<sup>1</sup>

NOT long ago the author, thanks to a fellowship from the Fund for the Advancement of Education, traveled from Pittsburgh to Chicago, to New York, to Princeton, to Cambridge, and to New Haven. He wanted to know how general education was faring in the great colleges of those areas. As a member of the English department in a college where general education courses were being initiated, he was interested in finding some good humanities programs. He wanted to pick up the tips which experience had taught the pioneers. Most of all, he wanted to know what the teachers of general education courses were thinking.

The teachers were eager to share their views. They welcomed the author into their classes, asked him to join staff meetings, gave up precious after-class hours for talk. Because he spent most of his time on just two campuses—those of the University of Chicago and Harvard University—the author could check the accuracy of his facts and impressions and sift them with some care. He could set what the teachers thought they were doing beside what their administrators hoped they were doing and what their students knew they were doing. Slowly, certain conclusions began to emerge.

General education, he learned, has had a slow growth at Yale and Princeton. In 1951, only 90 of 1,200 freshmen entered the Directed Studies program, the Yale version of general education. A volunteer, unselected group, these men,

if they follow their predecessors, will be more successful when they enter specialized programs in their junior years than the 1,110 who are following specialized programs from the beginning. Yet the program is not likely to be extended.

The closest Princeton comes to general education in the humanities is in its offering of one elective course called "The Western Tradition: Man and His Freedom," in its use of preceptorials, and in its "honors courses" in the students' junior and senior years. Princeton's Special Program in the Humanities permits exceptional students to break departmental lines and to see the wider ranges of learning. A similar program in modern languages is being developed there by Professor Ira Wade. Both he and Professor Whitney Oates, the chairman of the Special Program Committee, bring the benefits of years of study and experience to these experiments.

The typical teacher of a humanities course in general education, however, is a young man, enthusiastic about his job, uncertain at times of the meaning of general education, and too often forced by other professional interests, inexperience, and lack of time to transform his teaching into a pallid sample of the vigorous specialized education which he himself underwent. Consider his situation. He walks from the graduate school, his M.A. or a fresh Ph.D. in one of the humanities in his hand, and receives an offer to teach Homer, Dante, Goethe! Not in nine months, however, but in three! The other

<sup>1</sup> University of Pittsburgh.



six months he teaches the Bible, Milton, Dostoevski, Dickens, and Shaw. It sounds wonderful. He may not have the specialist's knowledge of more than two or three of these authors, but he is intelligent and a "quick study." He signs the contract and is a teacher.

Only at Columbia College is the new teacher given complete charge of a class. At the other colleges he is more likely to begin as a "section man," the discussion leader who takes over after the lecturer finishes. At Chicago he meets his students three times a week in section and joins them once a week to hear a lecture. At Harvard he attends two lectures with his students and conducts one section meeting. He is expected to clarify the lecturer's remarks, to connect the ideas with the students' lives, to reveal the resources of the humanities "for knowledge and wisdom about our spiritual aspirations, and our human cravings for justice, beauty, honor, integrity."

Save at Chicago, the teacher on a full-time appointment has a departmental affiliation as well as connection with the general education program. The problem of appointment and salary is complicated thereby, but administrators are convinced that each teacher should have a departmental identity. Although almost every college in the country offers some form of general education courses, the tradition in favor of departmental specialties stands firm. Older college teachers hesitate to give up their specialties to take over general education courses. That is the reason so many of the general education teachers are young men. And that is the reason, though it is natural for the young teachers to work harder at their jobs, that some of the general education courses have been unsuccessful. To teach a course which gives the student a substantial knowledge of Western

civilization, which makes him think about problems of values, which prepares him for life "as a responsible human being and citizen," requires a teacher with depth of education, culture, and personality. Such teachers—old or young—are not easy to find.

Columbia found one solution. Before its program was launched, the upper staff were convinced of the need for general education courses. These men then considered assignment to such courses an honor; the result has been a wholesome development of general education there. Columbia College has no separate general education faculty or administration and, consequently, much less of the break between department faculties and general education faculty, between college and university, that seems unhappily to be stressed at the University of Chicago. Even at Columbia, however, pressures of time and expense in recent years have forced many of the more experienced teachers out of the general education program.

Chicago met the problem by developing a staff of general education specialists, admittedly a paradoxical name. A Harvard, despite generous separate budgets for the General Education Committee and despite a fairly harmonious relationship with the departments which pay part of the salaries, there is still some looking down the nose at those who teach the general education courses. The Harvard section man, often a graduate student himself, must help the 90 students in his three sections to discuss the authors', lecturers', and their own ideas and to write their papers. Since he meets them only once a week, much of the teaching must take place in private conferences. It is not surprising that sometimes he tries to catch up by substituting a specialist's lecture for the customary

discussion or that he looks about for a departmental assignment. At all the schools the turnover in general education personnel is high. Success as a teacher of general education is not nearly so good a recommendation for advancement as is work as a scholar or success as a teacher of English literature or history or any other subject.

The teacher must sooner or later decide for himself whether Chicago, with its emphasis on form, has a truer view of the general education aim than has Harvard, with its emphasis on substance. He may include Columbia, Princeton, and Yale on the Harvard side of the question, for they pay at least lip service to Harvard's view. If there is a distinction in the kinds of general education in the humanities being offered today, this is it, in simplest terms: Chicago concerns itself chiefly with giving practice in how to read a Great Book; Harvard, Columbia, and Yale are more concerned with what the Great Book says. While all of them aim to teach students to think, Chicago approaches the texts from the writer's point of view, the other schools from the reader's. A humanities instructor at Chicago felt that if students ever absorbed the whole emphasis on studying literature through its form, they would never read another book. Fortunately, Chicago students, like all other students, never absorb that whole emphasis; the amount they do absorb, it is hoped, is enough to make them think about and decide upon the nature of truth.

The young teacher discovers that the emphasis on the value of the Great Books as the core of the curriculum has slowly shifted. This shift is noteworthy because it has occurred even in the colleges where the emphasis has been kept on substance. Harvard and Princeton center general education courses around

common themes, like "Ideas of Good and Evil in Western Literature." Thus they must use that criterion in selecting texts. Columbia refuses to admit that basis for selection, but the classes there consider texts comparatively anyway. The great ideas inevitably recur in the Great Books; comparison offers a natural basis for discussion. Columbia has fixed reading lists for its two humanities courses. No authors from the nineteenth or twentieth century are represented there. No substitutions or additions are made to the list from year to year. Its advocates do not claim that the list is perfect but that it serves the general education purpose as well as any other. The significance of this argument is that it places Columbia, as well as Harvard, with a more flexible list, involuntarily on Chicago's side.

General education has stopped for a time the tendency to substitute reading about the Great Books for the Great Books themselves. Educators have come to realize the truth of Jacques Barzun's statement that "to know and be at home with books a man must at some time or other read them for the first time." However, they realize, too, that there is no one list of Great Books that offers all the answers for life in twentieth-century society. Just as the Great Books' approach to the natural sciences proved impractical at Harvard and Princeton, so, too, their aid in the humanities, though undeniably more practical, is now seen from a truer perspective. Teachers are using additional means to give their students understanding of the methods and attitudes implicit in the humanities and to suggest to them the implications relating the humanities to wider contexts.

A related shift in general education theory at Harvard has seen a denial of allegiance to the principle that all stu-

dents should take the same general education courses. Columbia requires its students to follow a general education program for two years. Only two humanities courses are offered, one for each year. Chicago offers a single humanities course for each of four years. Consequently, at the two latter schools teachers of upper-level courses can assume a certain amount of knowledge and training in the students and can build their courses in sequence. Harvard has developed five separate humanities courses, from which the student must choose one to be taken during the freshman or sophomore year. Since the various courses arrive at the same goal, Harvard believes it is as possible to have an elective system of general education courses as of specialized education courses. Thus Harvard makes more allowance than Columbia or Chicago for individual abilities and tastes of students. Harvard and Columbia also offer elective upper-level courses in general education, none of them required.

The general education teacher may find aid in staff meetings. They help to explain the ambiguous label which names his job—general education—and to supply direction. They break down the senseless antagonism which has grown up between departments and general education staffs. The best staff meetings the author attended were those at the University of Chicago, where the teachers of each course met weekly. A permanent chairman gave the meetings enough direction to keep them relevant. A staff volunteer lectured for a half-hour or so on the unit's reading assignment, and then the meeting became an open discussion. Most of these meetings were extremely fruitful. They were the first faculty meetings the author has attended where no one objected to forced attendance or lengthy sessions. While most of

the teachers left the sessions with the same ideas and opinions with which they had entered, they had also been made aware of the issues and the likely lines of discussion.

The general education faculties at Columbia and Harvard were not satisfied with their staff meetings. The younger members were almost completely on their own to face the problems not only of teaching but of teaching general education. Teachers at Columbia felt their weekly luncheon meetings were more successful socially than professionally. The fact that older teachers are in the Columbia program may be the reason—and perhaps in this sense may be a disadvantage. Staff meetings are held for each of the Harvard courses, too, but they are so loosely organized and so irregularly attended that it is difficult for a visitor to appreciate their benefits.

How fast should the pace of the general education class be? One Harvard section man, troubled by the one-week-on-Pope, one-week-on-Hume routine, feared he might be producing cocktail-party scholars. He was looking forward to the day when he could teach a course just on Nahum Tate. Another, however, had no such fear; he felt that coverage was too much emphasized. A visiting professor at Columbia agreed with him. Himself a product of a system which stressed depth, he was amazed at the Columbia students' ability to join breadth and depth. Columbia assigns its students practically a book a week in the humanities course alone. However, it must be admitted that Columbia, like the other schools, has had to adopt the quiz device to insure the reading of the text before the discussion begins. All the colleges watch pace carefully as a factor which might turn a general education course into simply a rapid survey course.

Though most of the schools advocate

reading the whole of a Great Book and condemn specific day-by-day assignments, they compromise with this principle. Of eight texts read for one course in the fall quarter at the University of Chicago, four were read in part. The time limit affects text selection too. Student opinion, of course, was of all kinds. A Chicago student of moderate success had no objection to his reading assignments. He read each only once. At a Harvard open forum, the heavy reading lists were criticized as obstacles to re-reading and thinking about the materials. A freshman said that the need to gluttonize *The Divine Comedy* in three weeks had left him with a confused hatred of the masterpiece. Yet the teacher who answered him said that the time spent on Dante had been shortened from six to four to three weeks largely in compliance with student recommendations. A former Rhodes scholar liked being "snowed under"; he asked not only for more reading but for more difficult reading. The year's Student Council report revealed that Harvard students did less outside preparation for a course than the expected six hours per week.

Teachers interested in general education often find themselves arguing the merits of discussion versus lecture as a method of teaching. The argument is somewhat artificial, since few insist that only one or the other should be used. So far as coverage is concerned, there is no doubt that the lecture is the more effective method. Yet, if education is to be an active process, the discussion method must be given more use. Perhaps the best thing that general education has done for the student has been to emphasize the value of the discussion method. The method is time-consuming and alarmingly tangential at times, but in competent hands it works.

Chicago has done more to develop its

teachers into skilful discussion leaders than have the other colleges. In its discussion classes, employing devices like blackboard outlines and a single table and chairs to replace the usual desks and chairs, students become articulate. There and at Columbia, which offers no lectures at all in the general education humanities classes, students learn how to talk about their ideas, how to develop them, and how to evaluate them. They are constantly challenged with questions, not answers. Critics agree that these students learn how to talk; yet they wonder whether the students know what they are talking about. Has glibness become a substitute for understanding? The best remedy for glibness is to have other students listening intelligently and quick to expose any nonsense. On the Chicago and Columbia campuses the visitor felt a brisker intellectual atmosphere than at the other schools, where intellects may be spinning just as rapidly, but more quietly.

The lecture is the chief method used at Harvard, with a bow to tradition and economy. With 1,400 freshmen to teach, lectures for 50-500 students are more economical than sections of 15-25 students. Only one of the five elementary humanities courses at Harvard is taught primarily by the discussion method. In that course the proportion of lecture and discussion is what one finds at Chicago and Columbia. On all the campuses the author was assured that he was hearing the best lecturers. Yet students often insisted upon their right to be active by hissing a lecturer's poor joke, by walking out on a dull lecture, or by applauding the brilliant one. But such actions are largely mob actions, and learning should be individual. Most of the lectures were sound enough substantially; too often, however, the lecturers could not be ap-



preciated because of faults in delivery. Their audiences knitted and doodled, whispered, read, and slept. At Chicago, where one lecture per week has been reintroduced in recognition of the lecture's value as a teaching aid, the lecturers (more than one for a course here as elsewhere, despite the general education principle that one man should conduct a course) themselves agreed that the fall quarter's series had been a failure. Their lectures will improve. But will lecturers elsewhere have such candor in judging themselves?

The Harvard Student Council report in the spring of 1952 summed up its views on general education by saying that, while "General Education has had only modest success, both in its effect on students and in their conception of its objectives, . . . General Education has increased the value of a Harvard education" and is "far more satisfactory than the old distribution system." It is the author's belief that students at Columbia and Chicago would say the same of their experiences. Now that Chicago has re-

turned to a more conventional program, there are none of the colleges which ignore the value of both specialized education and general education in the undergraduate curriculum. As a teacher, the author could praise general education for its having caused teachers everywhere to redefine their goals and to assess their accomplishments. As a visitor, he saw it give back to the students an active part in their educations. He saw it pouring into their minds the classics of Western civilization and then questioning motives and values expressed in the classics. He was impressed with the students' determination to know the organizing principle behind their courses and lectures and discussions. He was impressed with the concern at Chicago and Columbia for giving all students an appreciation of the fine arts and with the lack of such concern at Harvard. He had little doubt that the students would still be able to talk with one another and with the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker after they left the isolation of specialized programs for adulthood.

### *NCTE College Section Meeting at MLA*

**Topic:** UNDERGRADUATE COURSES IN LITERATURE

"The Place of Literary History in Undergraduate Teaching,"  
DONALD F. BOND, *University of Chicago*

"Literature in General Education," LEWIS FREED, *Purdue University*

"The Case for Poetry," FREDERICK L. GWYNN, *Pennsylvania State College*

**Chairman:** FRED MILLETT, *Wesleyan University, Chairman of NCTE Committee on Approaches to Literature*

**Date:** Monday evening, December 28, at 6:00 P.M.

**Place:** Palmer House, Chicago

**Cost:** \$4.50

Send reservations as soon as possible to La Tourette Stockwell, NCTE office, 8110 South Halsted Street, Chicago 20.

## Round Table

### THE DEVELOPED PARAGRAPH

The mother smiled at the dawdling little girl and said, "Eat your spinach, dear. All good little girls eat their spinach." Whereupon, so the story goes, the little girl replied, "Name three."

The little girl's mother is blushing at the same pair of problems which face writers everywhere—especially student writers: making a casual generality square off with observed facts and supporting it with a sufficient number of true and representative instances. Because one way of tackling these problems has helped student writers, I would like to pass it along under the name of the "developed paragraph."

The heart of the procedure is the phrasing of a meaningful generalization which can be fully developed in a few hundred words. By "developed" I mean that a critical reader who has finished the paper would have few, if any, questions to ask about the generality—the topic sentence.

Almost any statement which has an expressed or implied plural whose referents tie in with the writer's experience is a candidate for development. These two requirements—that there be an expressed or implied plural and that this plural can be analyzed into parts which are incidents of the writer's experience—are vital. Without a carefully phrased plural, the student simply does not know what he is writing about. Without examples, he is either stymied or resorts to the automatic writing of clichés. In neither case does he answer the questions the reader has a right to ask. In neither does he give the reader anything substantially rewarding.

The most frequent difficulty is that a plural expression refers to too large a population: "Most people," "students," or "politicians," for example, are semantically over inclusive. Few writers can speak with authority for millions or even thousands of

humans. If phrases like these are reworked to refer to individual entities the student has had direct contact with, like "My neighbors in Elmwood," "the freshmen who sit on the library steps," or "four city councilmen," the writer will make a twofold gain: he will tie what words he writes with finite items of his own experience, and he will supply the reader with images so that both can share knowledge stored in common memories. The writer knows, now, what he is talking about—and so does the reader.

The second major difficulty is in recalling a sufficient number of instances to establish the truth of the topic sentence as it stands written. A student once read with obvious pride a short first draft of a paragraph depending on the statement "The toothbrush as a tool has many uses." He had written how the soldier uses it to polish brass buttons, the shoeshine man to apply polish, and the housewife to clean forks. He sat down, happily content that the assertion was developed. His jaw dropped when other members of the class suggested more than forty additional uses. But he jotted them down humbly, classified them under four headings, and wrote a six-hundred-word paragraph that established beyond dispute the usefulness of the toothbrush.

This stage, of slowly and critically nursing the implications of a dozen or so words, is the crucial one in development. Here the writer should stay until he actively wants to write. He is executing a leisurely intellectual dance between the general category and the specific one. He phrases a tentative generality, explores the implications of its parts, restates it, recalls the instances needed to support the second statement, simultaneously shaping and selecting. When he has said the same thing twice, on two logical levels, his material is under control. His instances cover the same

ground as his generality. He has announced his subject and knows it—knows it so well, in fact, that he is personally and emotionally involved. And emotional involvement is the nub of the need to communicate. He is ready to write.

Unity and variety of structure are matters of habit, concentration, and linguistic skill for adept students. For less practiced writers, they are matters for detailed attention in revision. I find that unity can be considered a matter of syntactic parallelism within main clauses. If the subjects, verbs, and complements of the example sentences are interchangeable to the extent that the resulting statements make fair sense, the sentences are probably unified. I ask students to draw up tables of the primary elements of their example sentences—subjects, verbs, and complements in separate columns. A glance down the columns is a quick test for unity—it is easy for the student to spot the place where he may have shifted his focus.

Structural variety rarely presents a problem. Given the confidence that comes with the knowledge that real substance is under control, plus the urge to communicate, few students have trouble with word order or structural monotony.

Developed paragraphs run to theme length—from three to twelve hundred words. Students want to know why the conventions of printed usage are being flouted. Part of an answer is that relatively inexperienced writers need this space to establish the full implications of general statements for readers they do not know, in manuscripts where editors set no limits. But experienced professionals need less space to give only essential information to readers of a special publication, in a minimum of space. Professionals compose in a hurry, too, and aim more at giving the impression that information is being conveyed than at candidly offering full evidence. The student has more time to examine critically what his words refer to and to regard his general statements as a tacit contract with the reader.

I feel that the procedure described here strikes at the central doubts that shackle student writers. Beginners so often choose large, inappropriate, hazily defined subjects; then they cover clean paper with familiar signs in an emotionally sterile ritual. But with some such procedure as the above, they gain ground rhetorically, semantically, and logically. They write about what they know about, choosing subjects close to their own experience. They restrict their subjects—the topic sentence acts as a semantic brake on wandering fancy. They define what they write about, then redefine when development of supporting instances makes modification necessary.

But the ultimate test of good writing is that people want to read it. From the way student papers are surrendered and intently read, in and out of class, from the faint fingermarks and tiny curled corners—I think my students enjoy their papers almost as much as I do.

MACCURDY BURNET

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

### TEACHING WRITING WITH A NEW TWIST

On many a weary evening after reading through a batch of themes at my desk at home, I have turned, often with a sense of relief, to reading a magazine that lay near at hand or even to reviewing the day's mail, advertisements and all. The contrast between my "relief" reading and the themes was considerable. One evening, while thinking over theme assignments and reviewing one of the hundreds of direct-mail advertisements which come to every teacher's home every year, I thought of the assignment which must have been given the ad writer. His letter was convincing, to the point, effective, and attractively displayed. If only I could get my students to write so effectively, I thought, and an idea was born.

For the next few months I collected and filed all the letters I received from publishers, magazine circulation managers, alumni

secretaries, fund-raisers, merchandise salesmen, and people who wanted to "serve" me. I had over sixty such letters by the time I was ready to introduce the unit on persuasive techniques to my classes.

My method of using the letters was this: I showed a few of them on the opaque projector, had the class as a group analyze them, and distributed a different letter to each member of the class. The assignment was to write an analysis of the persuasive techniques used in the letter, and the students were to add a comment at the end of the theme, indicating whether or not they would have responded to the "appeal to action" part of the letter, had it been sent to them.

The next assignment followed logically. The students were to write a direct-mail sales letter of their own, choosing a product that they themselves would seriously consider buying. A few of the students attached pictures to their persuasive letters, and this gave me an idea for a third assignment. I clipped a number of full-page illustrated advertisements from magazines and removed the written text which accompanied them. Again I used the opaque projector, this time to show the illustrations to the class, leading the students to analyze the advertisements and supply a hundred-word text, no more, no less. Following this, a "textless" magazine advertisement was distributed to each student, and the assignment was to write a text which would most effectively sell the product in the illustration. The most popular and, in some respects the most workable, materials for this assignment were travel ads. These, then, were the three assignments which resulted from the first idea.

In terms of positive student response and improved writing ability, the results, especially on the letter-analysis and the letter-writing assignments, were good. The response was enthusiastic, I think, because the technique was fresh; the students seemed highly motivated because their interest was aroused. Three reasons may account for this: first, the material was a little different from any the students had used before, that

is, the letters were "real," they had actually been sent through the mail and were not textbook examples of what letter sought to be. Second, the persuasion used in those letters was real. Although the teacher can present a step-by-step analysis of persuasive writing techniques—(1) get favorable attention for the subject and to the writer, (2) diagnose the problem clearly, (3) present the solution, (4) get assent or action—when the students see concrete examples of persuasive writing on the firing line as it were, they begin to sense that their assignment is more than an academic exercise. Third, whenever a teacher uses a new twist for an assignment, he is usually more enthusiastic in his presentation and the extra sparkle in his eye and a bit of fire in his voice are contagious.

The classes which had the letter-analysis and letter-writing assignments moved next to the presentation of controversial ideas. The students were to analyze a serious problem of our time and present a solution. Typical problems were the old chestnuts: capital punishment, mercy killing, lowering the voting age, etc.; yet there was something different about the themes this time. The extra attention which had been given to the analysis of direct-mail letters and advertisements had rubbed off on the more clearly "academically respectable" assignment. The analysis of problems was sharper, for the students began to perceive much of the cant that permeates many of the arguments on both sides of these controversial questions. They had found it easy to see the fallacies in the cigarette ads and the insurance salesman's letter, and, having been led gently to learning, they were able to tackle the stiffer critical analysis of their own prejudices and those of their society. Since the analyses were better, the solutions were more practical, and the appeals to action were saner and more sensible.

The assignments which developed from an idea conceived after a weary reading of a day's themes proved, for one teacher at least, very valuable. The writing of the students improved, and their analysis of problems



was clearer and more searching. Best of all, they seemed to take a renewed interest in presenting their material clearly and specifically, and, once encouraged by a successful effort, they set their sights a little higher and moved toward a greater level of achievement.

WILLIAM D. BAKER

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE

### LINGUISTICS AND THE SENTENCE DIAGRAM

During the past decade much criticism has been leveled against secondary teachers of English for their failure to produce students who are capable of communicating ideas in their native tongue. The liberal linguists are convinced that this failure stems directly from the teaching of prescriptive grammar, a set of outmoded rules which are said to inhibit natural expression. Feeling that the criticism is at least partially justified, the staff of the English department at Arkansas State Teachers College has reworked the content of a senior college course, called "Words and Idioms," retaining the old title. The course is now designed to orient prospective teachers to a method other than the prescriptive. Since 90 per cent of the graduates of this institution become teachers in southwestern public school systems, it is our belief that when the prospective teachers are aware of the new approach to the language problem, they, in turn, will transmit a new attitude to those they teach.

The course in "Words and Idioms" is planned so that language is approached from two major points of view, the historical and the grammatical. The course begins with a brief study of linguistics. The student is introduced to various theories concerning the origin of language and the need of man to communicate to his fellow-beings. This linguistic introduction makes it possible for him to learn that ours is one of a large family of languages, that it is a distant relative of Persian, that it is a first cousin of Ger-

man, and that it is not in the least related to Turkish or Chinese or Hungarian. He learns the pattern of development of English, with special reference to its basic Germanic character and the ever present influence of other European languages, specifically Greek and the Romance languages. This enables the teacher to emphasize the dynamic nature of English, the constant change and growth that have occurred in it, the ease with which it has absorbed vital qualities from other languages, and its remarkable ability to adapt itself to the exigencies of social, political, and economic pressures.

Word study seems to grow quite naturally out of this background of historical linguistics. Prefixes, suffixes, and stems are studied with a view toward increasing potential vocabulary. Recognition of our borrowings from Greek and Latin in the matter of prefixes and suffixes leads to a consideration of etymology. To stop with study of derivations would not be enough, however, because words change in meaning and grammatical usage; therefore, considerable time is devoted to a study of semantic changes and word connotations, with a view to the forthcoming study of descriptive grammar.

Half a semester has elapsed by the time a consideration of the word itself is completed. Not only has the student increased his vocabulary, but he has also developed a more flexible attitude toward language in its heterogeneous aspects. He is now equipped to approach the study of grammar and idiom with a more liberal and tolerant attitude. He is prepared to accept the idea that grammatical, as well as semantic, changes occur over a period of time.

Being fully aware of the danger of a sentence diagram as an end in itself, we nevertheless are convinced that the diagram presents to the student the clearest picture of the syntactical structure of a sentence. The diagram is simply and ultimately a visual aid. The Reed and Kellogg system is employed because of its simplicity, but other systems would serve the same purpose. Though many of the sentences diagrammed

conform to the patterns dictated by the eighteenth-century grammarians, the chief value probably comes from diagramming those sentences, loaded with idiom, which cannot be made to conform to the rules propounded by the die-hard textbook grammarian. Examples are easily found in literature of universally recognized merit, both early and contemporary. Shakespeare and O'Neill, Pope and Sandburg, Nashe and Hemingway, the King James Bible or its recent revision—all furnish the teacher with excellent examples of good usages which violate "the rule."

We believe that, as a result of the course in "Words and Idioms," we are turning out teachers with a more tolerant attitude toward language and grammar; teachers who, we hope, will, in turn, impress upon students in elementary and secondary schools the importance of communicating their ideas even at the expense of "the rules" of grammar. This new teacher is not an anarchist in the matter of language; he is, however, able to help students toward a mastery of the several levels of language usage which are current and most widely accepted in their environment.

RALPH BEHRENS  
EUGENE NOLTE

ARKANSAS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

### I, TOO, DISLIKE HALF-POETRY

"I, too, dislike (poetry): there are things that are important / beyond all this fiddle," says Marianne Moore in one of her disarming poems.<sup>1</sup> But when the elements that go into the making of a poem "become so derivative as to become unintelligible," she continues, "the same thing may be said for all of us, that we do not admire what we cannot understand. . . ." We, too, feel that what is genuine in modern poetry we warm up to, what is derivative we distrust. And, like Marianne Moore, we also feel that when

the raw material of poetry is "dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry. . . ." If we insist on this distinction between the real and the spurious in modern poetry, as we do in all other things, then we cannot dislike everything that poets write today.

Many lovers of poetry do not like modern poetry for one reason or another—because it does not scan or rhyme or make sense—but mainly because they do not understand it, they confess. Their main criticism can perhaps be explained, and very likely the fault is not entirely theirs. Yet the fault is not altogether the poet's. It may well be that for him the time is out of joint.

Instead of uniting the worlds of imagination and fact, as Dante's and Shakespeare's language had done, the language of modern poetry is divided into two kinds: the languages of fact and of symbol. Neither language can express the whole of man or his reality, as Renaissance poetry did. The poet who attempts to compete with science in a world of fact is in danger of suffering from emotional atrophy; and the poet who feels the need of a private mythology to sustain the creative impulse is liable to end up in a padded cell talking to himself. Yet both have this in common: a feeling of alienation from our society. (They have been shunted as useless by our machine civilization—no need to banish them, as Plato did from his Republic.) The poet in competition with science, however, desires to belong to the world of the machine, but the poet in pursuit of myths feels so completely cut off from society that he has declared his hostility to it. He refuses to recognize its reality. He has therefore encased himself within a protective shell.

It is this walled-in poet who offers real difficulties for those who say they dislike modern poetry. It is in his poetry that we find an unwillingness to communicate, for he seems to live in a world in which "the center cannot hold" and the pieces do not seem to fit at all. And with sweet poetic justice he has avenged his alienation from society by refusing to talk its language. What's the

<sup>1</sup> "Poetry," *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1951).

meaning of his incoherent, private discourse? Is his poetry becoming more and more complicated, with a whole set of private symbols, one inside the other like a nest of Chinese boxes?

Certainly a great deal of modern poetry is complex and neurotic—and irritating. One reason for the difficulty in understanding it is that the poet today expects a little more of his readers. He demands their full attention so that they may share in the creation of his poems, which are usually not made to scan or rhyme, simply because poetry has lost for our society its functional or ritual value. And because it is poetry that appeals largely to the intellect, the modern poet dreads the obvious and the tame as much as he shudders at an inevitable rhyme.

Still, the half-poets (the target of Miss Moore's poem) are the real problem, for in them we see the weaknesses of their betters magnified. It is mainly the imitators who keep the poet from his audience. In their desire to be "difficult," they have become wilfully obscure. In their snobbism they seem preciously content with the intimate symbols that make for coterie poetry. In their cynicism they expect their own confusion to be mistaken for profundity. And, although they seem to have learned every device and strategy of those they un-

ashamedly imitate, one recalls what Heine said of a minor poet: "Uhland's poetry reminds me of Bayard's horse: it has every conceivable virtue, but it is dead."

These remarks, directed as they are against the posturings of the near-poets, are not meant to give comfort to those who say they dislike all modern poetry. For them we would recommend the reading of some "difficult" modern poem, and perhaps their experience will be like that of Muriel Rukeyser's student, who, after reading "The Windhover" several times and growing angrier with each reading, reported:

... I felt very irritated and tired, and fell asleep. When I awoke in the morning I thought of the poem at once. The book was still open, and I read "The Windhover." It leaped into place, clearly and in a purity of speech and music I had never known before. I knew things I had not suspected, but in a strange way, like remembering.<sup>2</sup>

A good poem, whether old or new, should have that kind of effect on anyone who honestly believes it may be worth the trouble.

JOSEPH LEONARD GRUCCI

PENNSYLVANIA STATE COLLEGE

<sup>2</sup> Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry* (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1949).

### *Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Program*

Woodrow Wilson Awards are made to young people who have not yet begun formal graduate work in the Humanities or Social Sciences. Candidates may be nominated by any responsible member of the academic profession in any university or college. About 124 awards are available for 1953-54. Each award amounts to about \$1,250. Nominations should be in by December 1. For further information address Professor Robert F. Goheen, South Reunion Hall, Princeton, New Jersey.

# Current English Forum

Conducted by the NCTE COMMITTEE ON CURRENT ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

## FREQUENCY OF THE PASSIVE VOICE

The passive voice is usually discussed under the rhetorical principle of "force," often to the disadvantage of the category. In an effort to learn by statistical analysis the relative frequency of the active and passive voices, I studied page 1 and the editorial

| SOURCE                      | TOTAL | ACTIVE | PASSIVE |      |
|-----------------------------|-------|--------|---------|------|
|                             |       |        | No.     | %    |
| <i>New York Times</i>       |       |        |         |      |
| Headlines and captions..... | 160   | 120    | 40      | 25   |
| News items, p. 1.....       | 1,068 | 898    | 170     | 15   |
| Editorials.....             | 809   | 696    | 113     | 15   |
| Topics of Times.....        | 224   | 200    | 24      | 10   |
| Letters.....                | 666   | 559    | 107     | 16   |
| Verse.....                  | 28    | 27     | 1       | 4    |
| A. O'H. McCormick..         | 74    | 63     | 11      | 15   |
| Arthur Krock.....           | 89    | 74     | 15      | 17   |
| Total.....                  | 3,118 | 2,637  | 481     | 15.4 |
| <i>Time</i>                 |       |        |         |      |
| Captions and news...        | 1,907 | 1,725  | 182     | 10   |
| Advertisements.....         | 316   | 280    | 36      | 11   |
| Letters, masthead...        | 137   | 120    | 17      | 12   |
| Total.....                  | 2,360 | 2,125  | 235     | 10   |

page of the *New York Times* for December 28, 29, and 30, 1952, and the inside front cover and pages 1-42 of *Time* magazine for January 5, 1953. The figures here given relate only to verbs and do not include verbids.

The fact is interesting that so stylized a magazine as *Time* and so economical a me-

dium as advertising employ the passive voice in about one out of ten verb situations. *Time* (p. 25) states that "the camp . . . was equipped with a 'laboratory,' where prisoners were inoculated with . . . germs, blinded, gassed and otherwise deliberately injured, so that their sick and dying spasms could be observed through glass windows by German 'professors.'" Union Carbide (*Time*, p. 29) advertises that "carnotite is hauled to processing mills. After the vanadium is extracted, the uranium . . . is shipped to atomic energy plants." The *Times* on December 28 editorializes: "What has been done and is being planned is outlined in a current letter by Representative Judd."

In the following passage about "the cautious passive" L. M. Myers (*American English: A Twentieth-Century Grammar*, pp. 170-71) employs the passive voice while reprehending it: "The frequency of the passive construction in military and bureaucratic correspondence is caused partly by official policies of impersonality, but owes something also to the fact that passive statements can be made without indicating exactly who is responsible. The passing of the buck is thereby greatly facilitated—not to mention that the recipient is often reduced to gibbering frustration, and effectively prevented from making a further nuisance of himself."

It would appear that the passive voice is in good standing, the foregoing quotation to the contrary notwithstanding, and that its rhetorical effectiveness is often very satisfying.

HARRY R. WARFEL

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

<sup>1</sup> Margaret M. Bryant, chairman, Harold B. Allen, Adeline Bartlett, Archibald A. Hill, Kemp Malone, James B. McMillan, Albert H. Marckwardt, Russell Thomas, John N. Winburne, and Lou LaBrant.



## Report and Summary

### NCTE College Section Notes

THE SECOND ANNUAL *YEARBOOK of Comparative and General Literature* has just appeared. In its preparation the NCTE Committee on Comparative Literature has collaborated with the Comparative Literature Section of the Modern Language Association. This *Yearbook* is designed to offer assistance to teachers of English by providing a medium through which they can discuss teaching methods, the organization of programs and courses, guides to foreign literature and sourcebooks, new and modern translations of the classics, the integration of literature and the arts, and other topics. The editor is W. P. Friederich, University of North Carolina, associate editor, Horst Frenz, University of Indiana.

The current issue includes descriptions of the comparative literature departments of ten American universities, reviews of recent translations, a seventy-page bibliography of comparative literature (1950-52), and some ten articles, including one on "The Concept of Comparative Literature" by René Wellek and another on "Comparative, General, and World Literature in Japan." The *Yearbook* is available to NCTE members at a 20 per cent discount of the list price of \$3.50. College Section members are urged to provide the committee with contributions for possible inclusion in future issues.

The Committee on Comparative Literature is one of the six NCTE committees initiated by the College Section of the Council. Its primary concern is the teaching of comparative, world, and general literature and the humanities in American colleges and universities.

Since it is believed that these fields are becoming increasingly important as part of a liberal arts (or general) education, the committee has attempted to investigate problems "in setting up literature programs, in teaching world literature and the humanities

courses, and in studying the Great Books"; it has also encouraged the establishment and extension of programs and courses of this kind on the college level. As the Preface to the 1953 *Yearbook* points out, the functions of this committee are almost identical with those the editors have envisioned for the *Yearbook*.

Another recently completed Committee on Comparative Literature project is *A Guide to Comparative Literature* sponsored co-operatively by the NCTE and the American Library Association. This critical bibliography has been compiled by more than two hundred contributors under the general direction of Charlton Laird, University of Nevada. Ways and means of paying for the huge cost of publication have still to be found. Professor Laird was also editor of *The World through Literature* published in 1951 under the auspices of the NCTE. This is a useful collection of essays introducing the teacher and student of English to foreign literature and is still available from the Council office (price \$2.10 to Council members; list price \$3.75).

As part of its function the committee has also been active in sponsoring programs at the annual NCTE meetings. At the Los Angeles meeting this month it will present a symposium on "The World Literature Course: Its Scope and Its Limits." (In 1950 papers on "The Teaching of World Literature" were presented at the Milwaukee meeting and in 1951 at Cincinnati on "Resources in the Teaching of World Literature.")

Members of the committee are: Horst Frenz (Indiana), chairman, Roy P. Basler (Library of Congress), Ernest C. Hassold (Louisville), William Jacob (Idaho State), Charlton Laird (Nevada), Fred B. Millett (Wesleyan), Louise Rosenblatt (New York University), Harry R. Warfel (Florida), and Barriss Mills (Purdue), *ex officio*.

## *About Teaching*

A NEW SERIES OF COURSES IN ENGLISH the purpose of which is to promote international understanding through increased knowledge of the culture and tradition of other nations has been announced by the Department of Modern Languages and Literature of Goucher College.

**WESTERN COLLEGE (OXFORD, Ohio),** a small woman's institution of about five hundred students, in the fall of 1954 will become an "international" college. The board of trustees has announced that Western will place special emphasis upon the development of a broad program of international education. A greatly increased number of students will be recruited from other lands, and intercultural courses will be introduced designed to promote understanding of other peoples and their ways of life. The program will be introduced and expanded systematically over a period of five years. The number of students from abroad will be increased gradually until approximately 50 per cent of the entire undergraduate body consists of foreign students. The liberal arts curriculum will be changed to provide an intercultural base. The faculty will be increased by bringing scholars with international background and experience to the campus.

**WHEATON COLLEGE (NORTON, Mass.)** will introduce two new courses this fall, "Composition through World Literature" and "Classical Civilization," designed to give the student who will graduate with little Latin or Greek an introduction to the ideas, traditions, history, and art of Greece and Rome.

**HUNTER COLLEGE SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES** is offering this fall a course on the Negro. It will be equally divided between the Negro's cultural contributions and the social and political implications of race relations in this country.

AN ENCOURAGING REPORT OF THE breaking-down of racial barriers in classrooms throughout the country appears in *Time* (August 31). In communities and on campuses all over the United States there is ample evidence to prove one thing: wherever segregation has been abolished, no blood has flowed. There have been dire predictions of trouble and periods of tension. But the trouble has rarely materialized, and the tension has soon melted away. Numerous specific illustrations are given to prove the point.

A NEW COURSE IN VOCABULARY-building is now being offered by the Department of English at Lebanon Valley College (Annville, Pa.). Entitled "Word Study," the course will be given throughout the school year and will deal with methods of increasing vocabulary, a survey of the origins of words, and special problems of pronunciation and spelling.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY** is inaugurating several significant changes in its freshman and sophomore English requirements beginning this fall. Four full semesters of English will be required in the following order: first semester, composition; second, modern literature; third, traditional and historical backgrounds of literature (English, European, American); and, fourth, composition. It is hoped that the scheduling of composition the second semester of the sophomore year will forcibly remind students that composition is a continuing skill! The new arrangement will also make it possible for the student to do advanced composition with a background enlarged by what he has learned in all his subjects during the previous three semesters.

**ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE (ANNAPOLIS, Md.)** has been granted \$37,000 by the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Advancement of Education to institute a college teaching internship program.

AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM FOR prospective teachers is also being launched this fall by the University of Minnesota. Its purpose is to give advanced graduate students a year's full-time experience at an instructor's salary. It will be available to ten students who have completed their preliminary examinations for the Doctor of Philosophy degree but have not yet written their theses. This program has also been made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

A NEW TYPE OF DOCTORAL DEGREE in the humanities, designed to broaden the training of college and university instructors in certain liberal arts fields, is now being offered to graduate students by Stanford University. It is a pioneer venture in post-graduate education and is in part intended to train college instructors who will be fully qualified to do teaching and research in a departmental field. The program is intended to guarantee both intensive and extensive training on the graduate level. Specialized study in one of the major fields will remain almost as intensive as ever. The program has been established for an eight-year period under a grant of \$250,000 from the Ford Foundation and will permit at least five honors fellowships in the humanities to be awarded annually.

SIX SCHOLARSHIPS FOR GRADUATE study for members of the faculty have been established by Fairleigh Dickinson College (Rutherford, N.J.). The awards will be made on the basis of need and will be open for graduate study toward a doctoral degree.

LOS ANGELES CONVENTIONEERS should expect "temperate" weather at Thanksgiving. Last year the average for the month of November was 59 degrees; in the preceding years it was 61, 63, and 67. Usually that time of the year is dry, with about one inch of rain during the entire month.

Women will be comfortable in fall dresses

or suits. They should have scarves, a warmer blouse for the suit out-of-doors, light blouses for indoors. Los Angeles hotels are never hot like those in the East.

Men should wear fall or year-round suits and have topcoats.

Virginia Belle Lowers, of Los Angeles, supplied this information and added that in colloquial language they say to prospective visitors, "Wear something that you can take something off of and still be all right." (Try to omit that colloquial "of" and see how hard it is to make a good sentence!)

SIGNIFICANT EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS were released by United States Commissioner of Education Lee M. Thurstone on August 26, just a few days before his untimely death. The average salary of classroom teachers rose last year from \$3,240 to \$3,400. During the season now opening, the total enrolment in all kinds of schools and colleges will be about 2,000,000 more than last year. The high school increase will be only about 275,000, and that in the colleges only about 100,000. The public elementary and high schools of the country will be short about 345,000 teachers, and the deficiency can be made up only by overcrowding or the employment of unqualified persons. The shortage grows, too, and will be worse in the high schools as the war babies and their successors reach that level. Another source says that only in social studies is there a surplus of qualified high school teachers.

Surely, any teacher who encourages bright and socially minded students to go to a teachers college or to take education courses along with arts college work will be serving both the profession and the public.

THE 1953 CRISIS IN THE PUBLIC schools is constructively reported upon in the annual education number of the *Saturday Review* (September 7). It is clear from the several heartening accounts given of community efforts to help solve the chronic problems of teacher shortage, building shortage, etc., that there is increasing recognition throughout the country of the fact that the

quality of our schools is the citizens' responsibility, and not just the school board's. Three longer articles also have pertinence for the classroom teacher. In "More and Better Teachers," Francis B. Chase suggests that, instead of giving temporary licenses to unqualified persons, it would be more expedient to give recognition to the good teachers we already have by setting up teaching teams composed of a professionally competent teacher as chairman and, as teaching assistants, young people not fully prepared in a professional sense. The assistants would work under the chairman's direction instead of being left to fend for themselves, and both would profit. John Hersey (*A Bell for Adano, The Wall*) in "Better Classrooms for Less Money" summarizes the latest trends in school design; and C. W. de Kiewiet in "Let's Globalize Our Universities" argues the need for re-orienting our undergraduate curriculum "to correct our dangerous illiteracy in the life and thought of great areas of the world," particularly the East.

Changing school conditions are also reported by *Time* (September 7), which carries several pages in color of some of the new schools which have been going up around the country. Most of these express in physical form Dewey's idea that the purpose of going to school is growth. One of the most striking of those illustrated is that at Van Nuys, California, which fulfils the modern concept that school buildings should be able to expand easily (by sliding glass doors) into outside study areas in mild, sunny weather. In "Nothing's Too Good for Their School" (*Saturday Evening Post*) William L. Worden describes the township school of a remote logging area in Oregon which illustrates how the best can be obtained for any children almost anywhere if the teachers and parents want the best badly enough.

UNESCO'S NEW DIRECTOR-GENERAL is Luther Harris Evans, who resigned as librarian of Congress to accept this position. Taking office on July 4, Mr. Evans said: "Let us leave to other agencies and other

men the primary responsibility for peace in this generation. We are working to lay the foundations of peace for many generations."

SPONSORSHIP OF THE JUNIOR Town Meeting League has been taken over by Wesleyan University's Department of School Services and Publications, 356 Washington Street, Middletown, Connecticut. I. Keith Tyler, of Ohio State University, is president of the league, and the NCTE's special representative to it is Leon C. Hood, of East Orange, New Jersey. The League has just issued a booklet, *Youth Discussion on Television*, which it will send free to any teacher who cares to try to arrange such appearances.

TWO ARTICLES IMPORTANT TO THE teacher, because each analyzes provocatively the relationship between public taste and mass communication and also reveals much of interest about production problems, are "The Boom in Paper-Bound Books" (September *Fortune*) and "Radio, TV, and the Common Man" by Gilbert Seldes (*Saturday Review*, August 29).

Last year 250,000,000 paperbacks were sold for \$70,000,000 retail, 50 per cent more than the "trade books" sold. Of these, 38 per cent were mysteries and westerns, 47 per cent were novels, and 15 per cent nonfiction. How indicative is this of public taste generally? What does it indicate as to the effectiveness of our teaching? Two facts which seem to emerge are: more people are reading books now than before the appearance of the paperbacks; there is a new mass market for good books as well as trashy ones, if publishers learn how to exploit it. For example, last year 1,600,000 copies of the *Pocketbook of Verse* were sold, more than half a million copies each of the *Dialogues of Plato* and the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, and 10,000,000 copies of *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict, *Reconstructions in Philosophy* by John Dewey, and *Arts and the Man* by Irwin Edman.

Seldes discusses two moot questions: Do broadcasters underestimate the taste, intel-



ligence, and maturity of the public? Are the masses ahead of the media? He makes it clear that in some areas, in music and in news commentary, the broadcasters have built up an audience, that in others the audience has definitely been ahead of the broadcasters. All the researches point in the same direction: "People at every level of education, in significant numbers, do imply some dissatisfaction with the programs they are getting, and among these there are ten million people, not habitual book readers, not college graduates, who consistently ask for programs of a higher intellectual content." Seldes thinks that if the broadcasters accept their social responsibility, they can continue to pile up their profits without corrupting the taste and undermining the mental activity of the audience.

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH CAN TURN with confidence to the Film Council of America when they need help in its field. Its new executive director is Paul A. Wagner, who in early 1940 was part-time public relations secretary of the National Council of Teachers of English. Before that he taught English in the University (Chicago) High School, and his graduate study was in the English department. Since serving in World War II, he has had unusual experience as a business executive and as a college president. The Film Council has received some Ford money and may be counted upon for real service. The address is 57 East Jackson Boulevard, Chicago.

BRITISH BOOKS FOR YOUNG AMERICANS is the field of the new publication, apparently quarterly, called *The Lion and the Unicorn*. It comes from Robert Bentley, Inc., 581 Boylston Street, Boston 16, which controls the American distribution rights of all the books reviewed. Certainly commercial in its purpose, it is apparently an honest job and well done. Free to school and young people's librarians; twenty-five cents a copy to others.

THE WINNER OF THE 1953 COMPETITION for the "Yale Series of Younger Poets" is

Daniel G. Hoffman, instructor in English at Columbia University. His book will be published in the spring with the title "An Armada of Thirty Whales" with a Foreword by W. H. Auden, editor of the series. Manuscripts for the 1954 competition should be submitted between February 1 and March 1, 1954, to the Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BENJAMIN FRANKLIN MAGAZINE AWARDS was announced last spring by the University of Illinois. A gold medal and a scroll will be presented to the editor of the magazine of general circulation rendering "the most distinguished and meritorious service during the year." \$1,000 will go to the author of the "most distinguished magazine writing involving original reporting in which serious obstacles had to be overcome." Three of the others are for "the article best depicting a person, living or dead," for "the best piece of magazine humor," and for "the best short story." These three will carry \$500 each.

INTERNATIONAL P.E.N. BULLETIN of *Selected Books* is now entering its fourth year of publication. Up to now it has been subsidized by UNESCO, which, because of limited resources, can no longer underwrite the full cost of publication. The *Bulletin* has therefore been put on a subscription basis. Rates are \$2.00 a year. Address: care of *New Mexico Quarterly*, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

THE FIRST ISSUE OF *NAMES*, JOURNAL of the American Name Society, has recently reached us. Its purpose is to disseminate the results of study and research in the etymology, origin, meaning, and application of all classes of names. The first issue includes "America: The Story of a Name," by M. S. Beeler; "Irish Pioneer Onomatologists," by Robert L. Ramsay; "Poets and Place Names," by Marshall Smelser; and several other short articles and reviews. Address: University of California Press, Berkeley 4, California.

## New Books

### College Teaching Materials

WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY.  
World Publishing Company. \$6.00 with  
thumb index, \$5.00 without.

Despite temporary nagging competition, the leadership of the Merriam-Webster *Collegiate Dictionary* was never seriously in doubt from its first edition in 1898 to the fifth in 1941. Then Random House's *American College Dictionary* in 1947—with more legible type, more comprehensible definitions, a single vocabulary, meanings reasonably ordered by frequency, and many illustrative phrases—offered a challenge which the century-old Merriam firm met with the *New Collegiate* in 1949. Though a distinct advance in some respects, the *NCD* clung to its distinctive chronological sense order, the initial position of the etymology, the multiple vocabularies, and the traditional diacritics.

Now, to disturb the rather tense competitive equilibrium between these doughty giants, there comes almost unannounced a third and well-equipped entrant in the lucrative college field, unhappily but legally bearing the potent name of Webster, the *Webster's New World Dictionary*.

Only some of the claimed twenty-three distinctive features of the *NWD* are of prime concern to those of us involved with the choice of a book for college students. As a one-volume version of an original two-volume publication in 1951, the *NWD* has a larger list of entries—142,000 are claimed—and of definitions than have its rivals. This reviewer is glad to see for the first time in any lexicon a definition of "communication" which fits its use to designate some freshman courses: he regrets the continued absence from any dictionary of the meaning "grass strip between sidewalk and street" for each of the widely distributed terms, "boulevard," "parking," "parkway," "curb," "terrace," and "tree lawn." But any reviewer can thus criticize any dictionary; it is the whole picture which must be evaluated. And here one must judge that the lexical coverage of the *NWD* on the whole is good to excellent, though perhaps unevenly so in the light of some un-

favorable comment from specialists in the sciences.

The definitions are generally clear, free from polysyllabic equivalents, and often pointed up by apt illustrative phrases. Idiomatic expressions sometimes puzzling even to the native speaker are included and are defined with a richness unique in a desk dictionary. But the order of the definitions, guided by what the editors term semantic flow, is not consistent with any easily perceptible principle and sometimes actually turns out to be nothing but the straight historical order which the *NCD* already had commendably rejected.

As near as may be, the recorded pronunciations are those of informal speech. The editors have boldly adopted the IPA [ɪ] for the *ng* combination and have wisely followed the Barnhart-edited dictionaries in using schwa [ə] for the neutral vowel and thus aiming to prevent such affectation as the Merriam-Webster diacritics promote.<sup>1</sup>

Etymologies, again uniquely for a desk dictionary, are satisfactorily full. They are often taken back to Indo-European and frequently include useful series of cognates. But the emphasis upon semantic flow in the order of the definitions makes it undesirable to put the etymology before the meanings and thus suggest to the unwary that the present meaning is to be understood from the semantic past.

The *NWD* has an excellent historical account of the language and, better than any rival, it treats the rich variety of American English. It has even a good history of lexicography—lively, though ethically objectionable in its omission of the monumental contribution of the Merriam-Webster books during the past century.

Some of us who know the undergraduate's almost irresistible tendency to accept the first definition he encounters will find the *NWD*

<sup>1</sup> Clarence Barnhart, original editor of the *ACD*, had first used the schwa in the various Thorndike-Century school dictionaries published by Scott Foresman & Co. in the late 1930's.

sense-order to be, among other considerations, adversely decisive in a departmental choice. Yet others may not be annoyed by this feature and hence may be able to recommend the *NWD* as generally equal to at least one of its older rivals.

But with three major contestants in the current "Battle of the Dictionaries," we can decide only tentatively, for a fourth rival, certain to have merits demanding serious attention, is in the making. Meantime, we can enjoy and anticipate constantly improving dictionaries.

HAROLD B. ALLEN

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**APPROACHES TO POETRY.** 2d ed. By *Walter Blair and W. K. Chandler*. Appleton-Century-Crofts. Pp. 734. \$3.90. The approach to poetry in this volume is by type, and the over-all scheme remains the same as that of the edition first published in 1935. In other respects, it is considerably revised. Each of the first eight chapters starts with a discussion of one type and of one or more technical devices. This is followed by exercises, study questions, and finally the texts of the poems. Two other chapters emphasize the elements of change in poetry by examining the metaphysical and neoclassical schools. Two more examine the lives and times of Keats and Eliot and their works as individual poets. The chapter on Eliot is new. A considerable number of the poems are new, replacing others which have been dropped. Many of the analyses of individual poems are more detailed than those of the earlier edition.

**THE BEST OF WHITMAN.** Edited with an *Introduction and Notes* by *Harold W. Blodgett*. Ronald Press. Pp. 471. \$2.75. Professor Blodgett's choice of Whitman's "best" includes 140 of his poems and 40 selections from his prose. Part I presents the poems; Part II, the prose. The order in each is chronological. Nine of the original twelve poems in the first edition of the *Leaves of Grass* are included, as are several of his prefaces and the essays on "Independent American Literature" and "American Slang."

**POETRY AND LIFE: AN INTRODUCTION TO POETRY.** By *Clyde S. Kilby*. Odyssey. Pp. 392. \$3.50. An introductory handbook to the serious study of poetry by a college teacher who obviously enjoys it himself. The style is informal, almost conversational. The discussion is organized around six major topics: the world of

poetry, poetry and meaning, and the roles played by language, music, imagination, and integrity in creating it. Many complete poems (about 100) are used in illustration. Following each chapter is a section (40 pp.—more or less) containing poems for study, suggestive comments, and questions. Only poetry in English is included, but the illustrations range from the early English ballad to Archibald MacLeish. About twice as many British poems as American are used.

**POEMS FOR STUDY.** By *Leonard Unger and William Van O'Connor*. Rinehart. Pp. 743. \$4.75. Generous samplings from the works of 34 British and 8 American "major" poets from Skelton to Wallace Stevens. These are arranged chronologically and are followed by a supplementary chronological sequence of poems by some 48 other writers. The historical course of poetry in English thus is illustrated, and at the same time a considerable body of poetry useful for study and discussion in the classroom is provided. A critical introduction (35 pages) examines the language and structure of poetry. Brief biographical notes and a list of suggested reading precede the works of each poet. Commentaries, analyses, and study questions vary considerably in length and variety.

**FIVE PLAYS.** By *Ben Jonson*. Oxford. Pp. 569. \$2.00. A new volume in the World's Classics Series. Includes *Every Man in His Humour*, *Sejanus*, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*.

**FIVE FAMOUS PLAYS.** By *Oscar Wilde*, with a new *Introduction* by *Alan Harris*. Pp. 383. Scribner's. \$3.50. Includes *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and also *Salome*, printed with the English and the original French texts side by side. Harris' introduction is both biographical and critical.

**BEOWULF: WITH THE FINNESBURG FRAGMENT.** Edited by *C. L. Wrenn*. D. C. Heath. Pp. 318. \$4.25. A new edition designed particularly for the undergraduate student by the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford. Professor Wrenn, himself, states his purpose as "presenting Beowulf in its proper setting as a great poem to university students, and to make available in a readable and manageable form the more sig-

nificant results of recent scholarship." An excellent introduction (90 pp.) accomplishes the first; the commentary (45 pp.) deals mainly with the translation of difficult passages, the subject matter, and literary and historical matters arising from the text; textual footnotes are simple; technical linguistic studies are placed in the glossary. The text of The Finnesburg fragment is included, with a select glossary but without a separate commentary.

**SWEET'S ANGLO-SAXON PRIMER.** 9th ed. Revised throughout by Norman Davis. Oxford. Pp. 129. \$1.75. The eighth edition which appeared in 1905 has been reprinted nine times since. In this new edition the sections on grammar, particularly in the treatment of the verb, and on phonology have been considerably revised and the section on syntax expanded. The grammar covers the Old English texts printed in the second section—it is not a complete Old English grammar. Davis has omitted some of the biblical texts and all of the drill sentences of the earlier editions in order to provide fuller examples of Old English prose. These now include passages from Ælfric's *Prefaces*, Alexander's *Letter*, the *Leechdoms*, and longer extracts than formerly of the *Chronicle* and of Bede's *History*.

### Paperbacks

**THE CONFESSIONS OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU.** *A New Translation by J. M. Cohen.* Penguin. Pp. 606. \$1.00. Complete text, unexpurgated, translated into flexible, contemporary English.

**JANE EYRE.** By Charlotte Brontë. Penguin. Pp. 447. \$0.65.

**ALCESTIS AND OTHER PLAYS.** By Euripides. *A new translation by Philip Vellacott.* Penguin. Pp. 165. \$0.50. Three plays—Hippolytus, Iphigenia in Tauris, and Alcestis—with introduction and notes.

**THE DUCHESS OF MALFI.** By John Webster. Edited by Fred B. Millett. Appleton-Century-Crofts. Pp. 108. \$0.35.

**LANGUAGE AND MYTH.** By Ernst Cassirer. Translated by Susanne K. Langer. Dover Publications. Pp. 103. \$1.25. A reprint of the famous essay in which Cassirer analyzes the myth-making tendencies of mankind.

**PHILOSOPHY AND CIVILIZATION IN THE MIDDLE AGES.** By Maurice De Wulf. Dover Publications. Pp. 312. \$1.50. Reprint of a study first published in 1922.

### Nonfiction

**RECOLLECTIONS OF ANDRÉ GIDE.** By Roger Martin Du Gard. Translated by John Russell. Viking. Pp. 134. \$2.75. Martin Du Gard was Gide's closest friend. Like Gide, he was a Nobel Prize winner (for his family novel *The Thibaults*, 1937), and like Gide he kept a detailed daily journal. Many of his entries (from November, 1912, when they first met, until Gide's death in May, 1949) have to do with his conversations with Gide. Du Gard has taken these and woven them into the portrait presented here. His observations are candid, acute, and often very amusing. They are important for their spontaneous revelations of two distinguished men of letters.

**JULES LA FORGUE AND THE IRONIC INHERITANCE.** By Warren Ramsay. Oxford. Pp. 302. \$5.00. Jules La Forge was born in 1860 and died at the age of twenty-seven, but the influence of his writings is still being felt by men of letters. It was La Forge who polished

up the use of irony as a literary device to such a degree of brightness that he vitally influenced many such later writers as T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, and Ezra Pound in the art of saying things indirectly. This study of La Forge is interesting in itself but will be especially useful to all students of contemporary poetry and of world literature.

**THE LIFE OF ALFIERI.** Written by himself. Translated by Sir Henry McAnally. University of Kansas Press. Pp. 288. \$5.00. Alfieri (1749–1803) wrote a series of classical tragedies, six comedies, and several prose works, and both by his contemporaries and by Italians of the present day he is considered a major national dramatist. He also wrote the autobiography translated here. It has much of the raciness of Cellini's memoirs, but Alfieri did not have as many giants among his friends as did Cellini, so his memoirs seem to lack the intrinsic importance of Cellini's. However, he does give a



lively picture of eighteenth-century Italian society and considerable intimate detail concerning his own methods of composition.

**THE SHADOW OF THE THREE QUEENS.** By George Brandon Saul. Stackpole. Pp. 118. \$2.75. A handbook introduction to traditional Irish literature and its backgrounds designed as an aid to elementary students of Irish. Because of its explanations of mythological and historical references, it will also be found useful by the general reader interested in the literature of the Irish Renaissance in the late nineteenth century.

**AN EXPERIENCE OF CRITICS.** By Christopher Frye; **THE APPROACH TO DRAMATIC CRITICISM: A SYMPOSIUM.** Perpetua, 32 Newton Road, London, W2. Pp. 64. 7s. 6d. Christopher Frye writes delightfully about his own and other people's experience of critics. Alec Guinness supplies a Prologue, and eight distinguished London critics explain their own approach to their work. Illustrated with some wonderful caricatures by Ronald Searle. Appended is a convenient list of London dramatic critics.

**ELEMENTS OF CRITICAL THEORY.** By Wayne Shumaker. University of California Press. Pp. 131. \$2.75. Professor Shumaker believes that analysis and evaluation compose the whole critical process. He discusses the external and internal reference frames of analysis and the basic principles by which values are measured. Both teachers and students of literature and criticism will find what he has to say stimulating and helpful.

**CRITICISM OF FICTION.** By Helen McMahon. Bookman Associates. Pp. 189. \$3.50. A study of trends in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1857-98) and an analysis of its fictional standards. That the chief critical concept was realism is apparent, and the effect of science and the influences of French and Russian realism are also evident. "A Register of Reviews and Critical Essays" (40 pp.) will be found useful by both teachers and students because of its ready bibliographical references to contemporary critical reviews of the works, for example, of George Eliot, Thackeray, Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and Henry James.

**CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS OF ROMANTIC POETRY.** Edited by John Wain. Barnes & Noble. Pp. 240. \$2.50. Thirty reviews of poems by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews*. A new volume in the "Life, Literature, and Thought Library."

**THE COMPLETE MADISON: HIS BASIC WRITINGS.** Edited with an Introduction by Saul K. Padover. Harper. Pp. 361. \$4.00. Madison and Jefferson were close friends and trusted collaborators for over fifty years, but Jefferson's liveliness and gift of imagery have always tended to push his quieter friend into the shadows of the limelight they should have shared. Thus today Madison is generally remembered merely as an early President of the Republic. Actually, he was an original political philosopher who was also an eighteenth-century rationalist, a champion of religious and intellectual freedom, and the principal author of the Constitution of the United States. This volume, the first of its kind, is an attempt to introduce Madison's essential thought to the American people. It contains all of his main writings and a skilful introduction by the editor.

**THE SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS.** By Charles A. Lindbergh. Scribner's. \$5.00. Colonel Lindbergh tells the story of his life: his boyhood as a farmer's son in Minnesota and his heroic flight from New York to Paris. Twenty-two pages of halftones and line cuts. A fifty-page appendix of aeronautical data, illustrated. Spirited reading for young and old. September Book-of-the Month.

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**IN SPITE OF: A PHILOSOPHY FOR EVERYMAN.** By John Cowper Powys. Philosophical Library. \$5.00. "Consider . . . whether you have a philosophy of your own." The eighty-year-old writer believes we may each and all enjoy life in "spite of" the obstacles of experts,

loneliness, pride, orthodoxy and heresy, madness, class, insecurity, belief, other people. A chapter is devoted to each of these threats to personal happiness. "The individual by acceptance of his lot" may enjoy life under any circumstances.

**A FORGOTTEN KINGDOM.** By Sir Leonard Woolley. ("Pelican Books.") Penguin. Paper-bound, \$0.75; case-bound, \$1.95. The famous archeologist, whose work at Ur of the Chaldees is well known, began in 1935 an excavation in the Turkish Hatay near Antioch. This book records the results of seven seasons' digging and proof of relations between the civilizations of Greece and the ancient East. Illustrated.

**THE WRITTEN WORD AND OTHER ESSAYS.** By Hardin Craig. University of North Carolina Press. \$3.00. The six miscellaneous essays were originally delivered as lectures: "The Written Word," "Lucian and Lucianism," "Hamlet and Ophelia," "The Meaning of

*Macbeth*," "Burns and Lowland Scotch," and "An Ethical Distinction in John Milton."

**FLAMING MINISTER.** By G. R. Elliott. Duke University Press. \$4.50. In this rather detailed study of *Othello*, Elliott finds pride to be the central idea or force in the play—as he thinks it is in all Shakespeare's tragedies. He sees Shakespeare criticism abandoning the humanitarian interpretation of his plays. He studies the play in three "phases": "Othello's Visage" (Act I), "Patience . . . Grim as Hell" (Act II–Act IV, scene 2, l. 94), and "Wedding."

**THE ROMANTIC POETS.** By Graham Hough. ("Hutchinson's University Library.") Longmans. Text, \$1.80; trade edition, \$2.40. A British scholar competently reviews and interprets the work of Gray, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Hough examines the major works and general characteristics of each writer, and notes, in passing, similarities and mutual influences. The book is easy enough for a collateral reference in a survey course.

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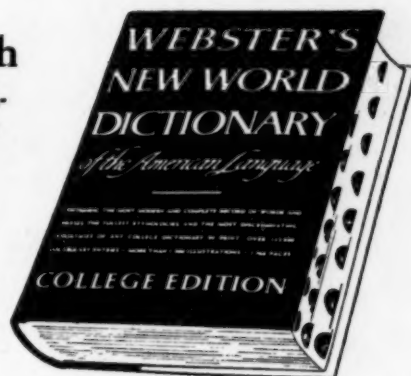
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